

ARTS+LEISURE

The Addison Independent

December 19, 2019



Sarah Ashe makes light sculptures using reed and thin paper from her home studio in Middlebury. She is also a painter and sculptor. See her work at Edgewater Gallery in town.

INDEPENDENT PHOTO / STEVE JAMES

Middlebury artist shines in light sculptures

W

BY **ELSIE**
LYNN PARINI

Welcome to the darkest week of the year. For some the solstice is a time of celebration; the time when we turn the corner and every day gets a little brighter until the summer solstice rolls around. For others, this week is just, well, dark.

Yeah, "dark" is definitely accurate. Here in Addison County we'll only get 8 hours and 53 minutes of daylight on Dec. 21.

So let's brighten things up a bit, shall we?

Meet Sarah Ashe. She's a Middlebury artist who creates light sculptures, as well as other paintings, sculptures, masks and more.

"I got into lights a long time ago," said the Baltimore native. "I came upon making lamps in such a strange way... Back in the '90s, (I was living in New Orleans at the time) I was making these little sculptures on wheels out of lime and orange skins, then I took a light making course during the summer at the Women's Studio Workshop in Rosendale, N.Y., where we focused on Isamu Noguchi's Akari lamps."

Noguchi's work follows the traditional methods

for Japanese Gifu lanterns made out of thin papers and ribbing (imagine a typical Japanese lantern). He modernized the look and named his work "Akari" — the Japanese word means "light," translating both as illumination and weightlessness.

Equipped with a Bachelor's in Fine Arts with a concentration on ceramics, sculpture and graphics from Bennington College that she earned in 1964, the Akari lamp inspiration plus electrical knowledge Ashe picked up in her fifth-grade shop course, Ashe began making her own light sculptures.

"It's been an interactive process," she said

SEE LIGHT ON PAGE 3

LIGHT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

during an interview earlier this month. "For the most part it's worked out."

Ashe's work is represented by Edgewater Gallery, Frog Hollow and the Gallery in the Woods in Brattleboro.

To craft her billowing and warm light sculptures, Ashe starts by soaking basket-weaving reed in water. She then secures a lampshade ring to the top of the structure to "make sure it has a chimney for the head to escape from."

From there, she bends and wraps the reeds into a pleasing shape. She holds the reeds together with mini alligator clips — "they're like very small jumper cables. They have a nice strong clip to them."

Then she ties the reeds to the lampshade ring and glues the reeds together where they overlap. This adds stability to the structure. Next comes the paper.

Ashe uses a very thin Thai paper called Momi; sometimes she'll also use a sturdier paper with bark inclusions to add a bit more texture.

"I cut the paper and then glue it onto the ribs," she explained, as she pointed to a work in progress perched on a temporary stand. "I make a great effort to keep the paper on the rims... It's an extraordinarily labor intensive process."

Sometimes Ashe lets the paper overlap, which creates a layered effect. Other times, she cuts the paper precisely to the boundaries of each opening.

To finish, Ashe sprays the whole piece with a watered down glue. This hardens and secures the piece. Her finished paper sculptures can be mounted as standing lamps, table lamps, hanging pendants, sconces... pretty much anything you could imagine.

"A lot of my inspiration comes from my walks," she said. "I collect dried things. The lamps that come from those ideas are never exactly what I see; that's part of the fun — making it up. I'm not rigidly wed to any form or idea."

Ashe opened one of her sketch books, with shapely scribbles scattered around the pages.

"Here's one that was a milkweed pod inspiration," she said. "And here's another that looks like flower petals... this one looks like sailboat sails."

Oh, and don't forget the chicken lamps.

"I really like making chickens," said Ashe, who moved to Middlebury in the early 2000s. "It's



Sarah Ashe stands in her studio on South Street in Middlebury, where she makes light sculptures, paintings and more. See her paintings in the Small Works show at Jackson Gallery in the lower level of Town Hall Theater.

INDEPENDENT PHOTO / STEVE JAMES

such a Vermont thing."

Before calling Vermont home, Ashe and her husband Tom Dunn (who's also an artist, too — a wood turner) lived in New Orleans. They used to rent their Middlebury home during the academic year and return just for the summers, but after Hurricane Katrina the traveling became too much and they decided to make Vermont their permanent home.

Katrina inspired Ashe to use her lamp techniques to make new sculptures like her "convoy," which depicts the wave, the Superdome, the rescue supplies, housing problems and the re-building conundrum.

"That sculpture led me into painting," Ashe explained, which was a good thing because her energy for creating light sculptures was beginning to burn out. "After I started painting, the sculpture world opened up again... I have found that I really need to work with lamps and painting. In some strange way they inform each other. If I do only this or that, I dry up; having both is energizing."

To enjoy some of Ashe's light during this dark season, check out her paintings at the Jackson Gallery in the lower level of the Town Hall Theater in Middlebury, they're part of the small works show on view through December. You can see her light sculptures anytime at the Edgewater

Galleries in Middlebury, and Ashe welcomes anyone to come to her home studio on South Street to see her process and some of her other work. To reach Ashe, email sarahsashe@gmail.com.



MIDDLEBURY
ACTORS
WORKSHOP

Announces Auditions for its 2020 Season!

Casting select roles in:

Outside Mullingar, by John Patrick Shanley (APRIL)

Rosemary Muldoon aged 35 – 40, a stubborn, determined, single Irish woman who lives on a rural farm, romantic and unusual.

Anthony Reilly, aged 42, a strange, shy, poetic man, a farmer and a loner.

A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens (DECEMBER)

Narrator #1 – Male, 40's – 50's (Bob Cratchit, Jacob Marley and others)

Narrator #2 – Female, mature (Christmas Past, Char Woman, etc.)

Narrator #3 – Male, 20's – 30's, (Fred and others)

Narrator #4 – Female, 30's – 40's (Mrs. Cratchit, Laundress, and others)

Narrator #5 – Female, 18 – 20's (Belle, Mrs. Fred and others)

Narrator #6 – Male, 40's – 50's (Fezziwig, Christmas Present, Old Joe, etc.)

Narrator #7 – Female, 18 – 20's (Martha and others)

Narrator #8 – Male, 20's – 30's (Topper, Christmas yet to come, etc.)

Narrator #9 – Male, 10 – 15 (Young Scrooge, Peter Cratchit, etc.)

Tiny Tim, Male, 4 – 7yrs, frail, thin and bubbly

Young Girl, Female, 7 – 9rs., Belinda Cratchit, 'Want', and others.

Audition slots are available on Jan. 2 & 3 from 6 – 8:30pm and Jan. 6 from 5 – 6:30pm at Town Hall Theater.

Auditioners should come prepared to read from sides, and we'd like to see a monologue, if you have one. Audition slots can be had by emailing: Melissa@middleburyactors.org

Middlebury Actors Workshop is a small professional theater company in residence at Town Hall Theater. Local actors are encouraged to attend.

