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On Exhibit: Sacandaga Valley Folk Art series to be shown in Northville

By Indiana Nash | September 2, 2020



Artist Linda Finch is pictured between two of her paintings in the Sacandaga Park triptych. Provided photo

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At least that's the case with her "Sacandaga Valley Folk Art" series, which will be on view on Saturday at the Northville Cemetery.

"I've got a master's degree in art so it's odd now that I'm doing folk art, but I choose that direction because... without perspective, you can do all kinds of things that ordinarily would not be in a scene," Finch said. "You can take things far away and make them close up. You can move things around; you can tell stories much easier with folk art."

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Her series focuses on the history of the Sacandaga Valley, particularly before and during the creation of the Great Sacandaga Lake in the 1920s. Before that, several small communities lived along the Sacandaga River, which was a flood hazard, and because of that, officials decided to dam the river and create a reservoir. Many were displaced in the process, including some members of Finch's family.

Her mother was born in a home that was destroyed and her great grandmother's grave was moved in the process, along with more than 3,000 others.

"I've got her casket marker, which is kind of interesting; that'll be in the show. So [it's] a very personalized family history," Finch said.

The series stretches across 13 canvases and the most grisly work, called "Boneyard Gang," depicts graves being unearthed, with workers in the foreground and a home burning in the background.

Others show more joyous times before the lake was created, with views of Sport Island, which Finch said was famous for balloon ascensions, boxing, professional baseball games and horse racing. In her work, it's an idyllic landscape, featuring a baseball diamond and sailboats.

Finch was awarded a grant from Saratoga Arts via the New York State Council on the Arts to complete the series. She worked with several community members and groups, like the Edinburgh Historical Society and the Northville Northampton Historical Society, to ensure the works accurately depict the area.

For some pieces, it was challenging to fit in so many storylines on the canvas, especially when it came to painting a triptych of the Sacandaga Park. It was a popular tourist destination in the early 1900s, bringing in around 90,000 people each year, according to Finch.

"They were extremely intricate and they took months and months to do because there was so much in them. I initially was going to make one canvas. Then my husband looked at a map and said 'You can't jam them all into one,' so he helped me arrange them and blocked them off into three different segments," Finch said.

The first shows President Warren Harding arriving at the Adirondack Hotel via the FJ&G Railroad. There's a balloon ascending into the clouds in the background, along with Methodist camps in the middle ground.

The second depicts the midway, packed with people, a rollercoaster ride, a carousel, a dance hall and more. Sport Island makes up the third detailed canvas, finishing off the triptych with a sweeping view of the river.

"[For] some of the paintings, I used brushes that had three to four hairs on them to get the details. It took about a year to get these 13 canvases done," Finch said.

During that time, she learned quite a bit about the history of the area, which she moved back to from the Finger Lakes just a few years ago.

"I think my big takeaway is that if people don't talk about their history to their children and their families it can just disappear overnight," Finch said. "All you have to have is an illness or a death and all those resources and all those connections can disappear. I didn't realize that actually, I was a resource, a historical resource. I just [went from] day to day to day."

Through the series, she also depicts some of the longstanding local and family traditions, like the Doins, a parade celebrating Independence Day.

"My mother used to love it and used to go to the parade, and I kid you not, all the lumberjacks came down from the mountains and they would participate in this and have things like they never saw before like cotton candy or candy apples. They used to sell bananas, that's where my mother had her very first banana," Finch said.

The artist hopes to keep those memories, which have been passed down from generation to generation, alive in part through the "Sacandaga Valley Folk Art" series. At the start of the year, before the pandemic began impacting the Capital Region, she had several exhibitions lined up in the area. However, many had to be rescheduled or reimagined, hence the reason why the first one will take place on Saturday at the Northville Cemetery fence.

"You have to be creative in the time of COVID," Finch said.

The show will run from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and representatives from local historical societies will be present to answer questions. The cemetery is located at 303 South Main St. The show's rain date is Sunday. Then the series will be shown at the Northville Library from Sept. 15-Oct. 30 and at the Nigra Arts Center in Gloversville from Nov. 12-Jan. 21, 2021.