

# artscope

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painting **BEYOND NATURE**  
in **MID-COAST MAINE**

**SCULPTURE FINDS its VOICE**  
at **BROWN'S BELL gallery**

**BOSTON ATHENAEUM** reminds us of  
what **ABSOLUTELY MODERN** looks like

**QUESTION your PERCEPTIONS**  
at the **CURRIER MUSEUM**

the **MAGNETISM** of **PROVINCETOWN,**  
**YESTERDAY and TODAY**

# IT TAKES A VILLAGE TWO YOUNG VERMONTERS ARE PROOF POSITIVE Art Needs Community and Community Needs Art

“Robots and Rayguns”  
The S.P.A.C.E. Gallery  
Soda Plant Building  
266 Pine Street (Suite 105)  
Burlington, Vermont

Through July 31

“The HIGHLOW Project”  
Helen Day Art Center  
5 School Street  
Stowe, Vermont

August 23 through 29



ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT: Interior of S.P.A.C.E. Gallery.

## TWO YOUNG VERMONTERS ARE REDEFINING THE PARAMETERS OF THE “ART OF COMMUNITY” — BOTH ON THEIR OWN TERMS.

Twenty-somethings Christy Mitchell and Ned Castle could hardly be more different. One is a Savannah College of Art and Design grad, who moonlights as a lighting designer as she builds a small arts empire on Burlington’s South End; the other is a largely self-taught photographer, who finally found his passion for ethnographic work when he met two young men from Rwanda. Both make community an integral part of their artistic lives.

A self-proclaimed dabbler in the arts, Mitchell graduated in 2003 with a concentration in metals and jewelry. Post-graduation, she made a pilgrimage to Vermont upon the urging of a good friend. Immediately, she found a home in Burlington’s South End arts district, where local studio and gallery owners took her under their wings. When she started designing lights for Steven Conant, owner of Conant Metal & Light, the metaphoric light bulb went off in her head: she wanted to open a gallery space in the empty caverns of the former soda plant building, a ginger ale bottling factory in a former life. Conant, one of the first members of the South End Arts and Business Association (SEABA), gave her the green light in August 2008.

Now, Mitchell’s S.P.A.C.E. Gallery (which stands for Soda Plant Artist Collective Environment) is home to 12 artists — including sculptor John Brickels and internationally-known doll artist Beth Robinson — and hosts monthly shows of new art from up-and-coming talent. The business model is simple: Studio artists rent the space, which allows Mitchell the freedom to host shows not bound by sales. This is of great importance as she is dedicated to providing new artists with an opportunity and an audience. With audience numbers topping off at 2,000, it’s a fantastic vehicle for exposure.

July will bring “Robots and Rayguns” to the gallery, a group show built around Brickels and including artisan Jonathan Ward, illustrator Dan Made, painter and illustrator Justin Atherton and painter Martha Hull. August will bring the gallery’s second-annual art auction, including artists from New England and Montreal. And Mitchell is already brainstorming for the celebrated South End Art Hop, coming up in September. By then, she hopes a new 1,500 square foot addition will be ready for prime time. Works by textile artist Wyle Sofia Garcia and fiber installation artist Mary Admasian are in progress.

By September, Ned Castle will have toured his show “The HIGHLOW Project” through three Vermont cities — Burlington, Brattleboro and Stowe. A series of serendipitous moments led Castle in the direction of these large-scale photographs that reflect high and low moments in the lives of Vermont teens who are either homeless, runaway or considered youth-at-risk. The project is funded by the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs (VCHRYP), which comprises 13 community agencies.

Castle comes to photography via a circuitous route. He developed film in the basement of a biology building at Williams College; then, in his junior year, a trip to Florence and time spent with a photography mentor helped him hone his craft. When he returned to Vermont, he befriended two young men from Rwanda and created a photo essay about their lives. That got him involved with Vermont’s refugee resettlement agency and resulted in the show “In Their Own Words,” a photographic retrospective that melded imagery with first-person narratives from Eastern European and African refugees. The show is now housed



ABOVE: Christy Mitchell at work in S.P.A.C.E. Gallery.  
BELOW: Installation shot of HIGHLOW Project.

at the Vermont Folklife Center. Castle then created "Indigenous Expressions" for the ECHO Center, a series examining Vermont's indigenous communities.

His portfolio, which expresses sensitivity and gives each subject a quiet power, got him a gig doing photojournalism work for VCHRYP. He hit the road, traveling across Vermont, stopping at drop-in centers to meet with youth. At the first meeting he joined, the kids talked about their high and low moments of the day. That group conversation planted the seed for what would become the HIGHLOW Project, which is set to tour throughout Vermont this year.

Castle recruited youth across the state and put the creative decision-making in their hands: they would identify the moments to be captured, work on set for the reenactment, then record an audio narrative describing both moments.

When I went to see the show open in Burlington, I was first taken by the large-scale photographs, and then captivated by the phones that accompanied each set of images. Viewers are invited to dial in and hear each subject discuss his or her moments. In addition to providing context and substance, the audio elements forge an emotional touch point between subject and viewer that transforms a flat, one-way experience into a two-way participatory moment.

Mitchell and Castle are proof positive that today's young artists and curators aren't flying solo — they are finding ways to create and present exciting art and build community at the same time. By doing so, they are affording visitors and viewers an opportunity for interconnectedness and a chance to be an integral part of the experience of art making.

Alexandra Tursi

