

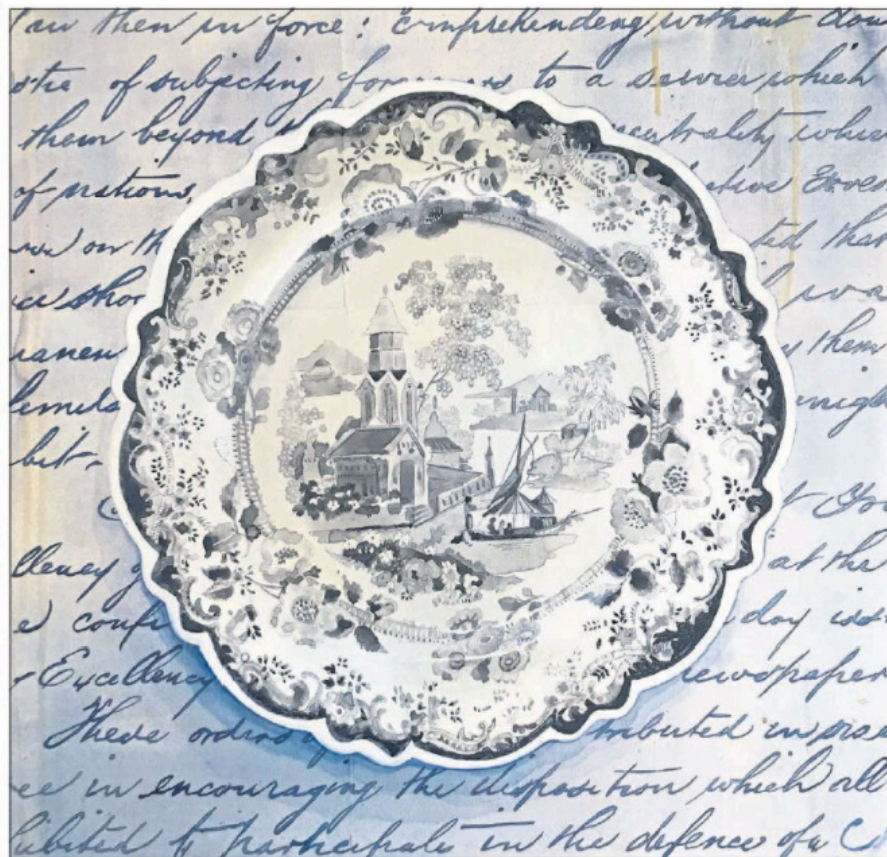
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ART



Renée Bott's "Dinner Plates" series was inspired by the pandemic.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RENÉE BOTT

Craving connection

Artist reflects on lost dinner parties in Mill Valley exhibit

By Colleen Bidwill
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Renée Bott has always been a little nostalgic about the past.

She remembers fondly the days when she and her mother would write each other handwritten letters when she was away at college, an art form she's seen disappear with the rise of technology. And when the Berkeley artist retired in 2016 from Paulson Bott Press, a fine art print publisher in Berkeley she co-founded in 1996, the work she began to create often reflected on modes of communications and how we've told stories and interacted with each other.

For her latest series, "Dinner Plates," inspiration struck during the pandemic when she was isolated and stuck at home, longing for the dinner parties she used to have with friends.

"I just was really missing that interaction and exchange of thoughts and ideas," Bott says. "I was craving to have a nice dinner party with my friends, and I thought about how uncommon it was for people to come and sit around the table and have a decent dinner on nice china, which is something I don't do anymore. How there was a formality, a reverence, to sitting down and breaking bread to-



Renée Bott's "Dinner Plates" series can be seen at Seager Gray Gallery in Mill Valley through Sept. 30.

gether. And COVID stripped us of that possibility."

From these pandemic musings came her latest eight-piece acrylic on paper series that can be seen at Seager Gray Gallery in Mill Valley from noon to 5 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays and noon to 4 p.m. Sundays through Sept. 30. Some of her other works are also a part of "Oasis," a group exhibit also in the gallery by gallery artists

designed to "soothe the restless spirits of these times" through the end of the month.

Bott's painted works showcase different pieces of transferware china, a style of decorated china developed in Staffordshire, England, around 1760, and their unique designs that she found on the internet and one from her own personal collection, from green ivy to birds

EXHIBIT » PAGE 2



Berkeley artist Renée Bott has spent the last few years working on her practice.

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— Renée Bott

THEATER REVIEW



PHOTO BY ROBIN JACKSON

Marilyn's (Pamela Hollings) gregarious and happy personality drives her roommate, Abby, crazy in "Ripcord."

Poignancy trumps comedy in 'Ripcord'

By Barry Willis
If correspondent

One of the first Marin theater companies to emerge from the pandemic, Ross Valley Players has launched its new season in the gorgeously renovated Barn Theatre with "Ripcord," by David Lindsay-Abaire, author of "Good People," "Rabbit Hole" and many other popular thoughtful plays.

Directed by Chloe Bronzan (who helmed last year's wonderful "Silent Sky" at the same theater), "Ripcord" is an "Odd Couple"-inspired story of two widows battling for control of a room in a residential retirement center. Abby (Tori Truss), a cranky loner, tries mightily to drive out her ceaselessly upbeat roommate Marilyn (Pamela Hollings). Abby is morose and uncooperative, while Marilyn is gregarious and happy, characteristics that drive Abby bonkers. The two square off in a series of continually escalating challenges, the goal being either ownership of the bed by the window, or control of the suite altogether. The challenges culminate in a sky-diving adventure — hence, the show's title.

Bau Tran puts in a marvelous performance as Scotty, an orderly with enormous patience who brings them their meals and medications, and frequently has to separate them, like a referee in a boxing match. Will they go down fighting or learn to live not-so-happily ever after? That's the motive force propelling "Ripcord."

North Bay comedic actor Peter Warden (who also appeared in "Silent Sky") adroitly handles multiple secondary characters, as do Nate Currier and Rebekah Kouy-Ghadosh, on a versatile quick-change set by Tom O'Brien. Set painter Dhyanis, costume designer Michael A. Berg, sound designer Bruce Vieira and lighting designer Tina Johnson all make significant contributions.

'RIPCORD' » PAGE 4

IF YOU GO

What: "Ripcord"

Where: The Barn Theatre, 30 Sir Francis Drake Blvd., Ross

When: Through Oct. 10; 7:30 p.m. Thursdays; 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays; 2 p.m. Sundays

Admission: \$15 to \$30

Information: 415-456-9555, extension 3; rossvalleyplayers.com

Rating (out of five stars): ★★★

Exhibit

FROM PAGE 1

to flowers to water scenes. Underneath, she painted on paper excerpts from letters she found of the same era and from a journal she got from a paper conservator in Oakland.

A different era

As she combed over letters of Civil War soldiers asking about what was going on at home, discussing financial matters as well as generals writing to other generals about what was and wasn't working during the war, she got a glimpse into another time.

"The content of the letter was less important to me than the actual handwriting, because handwriting is like a fingerprint. Everyone has their own individual style and I am fascinated by that because now when we communicate with each other digitally, we don't get to feel the character of a person when it comes across typed out," says Bott, whose "Letters Home" series evoked nostalgia for her childhood when she was taught cursive. "When you sit down and handwrite a letter, there's a whole different timing and way that you view time and experience time, instead of doing something on the keyboard."

In a way, she saw each piece as a "plate portrait," a look into the person who may be sitting at the table, each one different from the next.

Art is something that came naturally to Bott early. "Growing up, I really struggled to learn how to read, as did my father, he was very dyslexic," she says. "My parents were really supportive of me doing artwork because that was one thing that I was

very attracted to, and loved spending time doing. And my dad was frank about it. He said, 'You're good at this, you should pursue it.'"

But everything changed when an art teacher in junior high school nudged her to try printmaking.

"I used to draw a lot with pen and ink, and he said, 'Your drawings are a lot like etchings, have you ever done an etching?' I said, 'No,' and he said, 'Go to the hardware store with your dad and buy a piece of brass,' I did, and I brought it to school and he coated it, gave me a needle and said, 'Go draw on it.' The minute I did that I knew I wanted to do that a lot more. I got into college and the first class I signed up for was etching."

Master printer

After getting a bachelor of fine arts in printmaking at University of Massachusetts Amherst, she got a job as a printer at Crown Point Press in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she learned and perfected the craft of intaglio printmaking, and earned the title of master printer. After 11 years, she left to create Paulson Bott Press, where she worked with renowned artists such as Martin Puryear, Kerry James Marshall and Tauba Auerbach.

In 2016, Paulson Bott Press' archive was acquired by the de Young Museum in San Francisco.

"I had been in printmaking for 31 years, and I loved printmaking and it was really fun running a business and helping other artists, but I just felt like I needed a change and to pursue my own work," says Bott of her retirement.

Bott, who has a master of fine arts from the California College of the Arts, says her longtime career work-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RENÉE BOTT

"Dinner Plate Sepia" by Renée Bott.



Renée Bott's "Deer Moon" is a part of "Oasis."

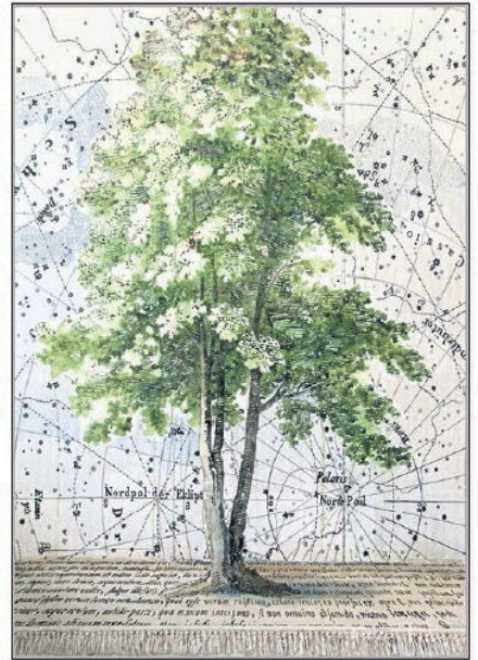
ing with professional artists changed how she approaches her art now.

"When you are a student of art, the teachers are trying to teach you how to be an artist, but you don't really know unless you have seen it in action," she says. "You think you are doing it, but it's really when you work side-by-side with them, you see it's not easy, it takes complete discipline, and you have to be serious

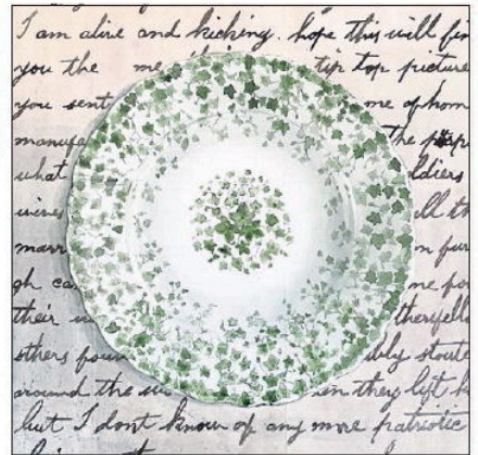
about it. It's not all fun, it's not like a hobby. You have to take it seriously.

For those who come visit the gallery, she hopes the works speak to them.

"This definitely came out of something I was longing for and I hope the viewer can put that together, that it's about communication and being connected to each other," she says. "I just want people to remember to stay connected."



"Finding Polaris" by Renée Bott is featured in Seager Gray Gallery's "Oasis."



"Dinner Plate Ivy" by Renée Bott.