

June 2013

meet the artist

Den Bento, artist with a dream

by Gerri Young

The art of Mexican-Brazilian graphic designer, Denisse Bento, sings with color, line and energy; energy springing from within her diminutive and driven self.

Arriving in Blacksburg from Mexico in summer 2011, a year later Bento had already made a name for herself and her art by winning First Place in the town's annual Art at the Market and joining the Blacksburg Regional Art Association (BRAA).

The second time she attended the association's monthly meeting, she volunteered to act as the designer in a project to update the organization's logo, brochure and website.



By December 2012, she was invited by the Town of Blacksburg to design a mural in hopes of winning the Virginia Tourism LOVE-work grant as part of the state's social media campaign to share the message "love is at the heart of every Virginia vacation." By April 2013, the mural was a done deed, placed high for all to see on an historic building on downtown Blacksburg's Draper Road.

"Since coming to Blacksburg," commented Bento, "I have met so many people and become interested in the community and its artists. It is very important to me for people to take artists seriously, especially when it comes to being professional while being creative and working as a team."

Denisse Bento records the hanging of her LoveWork mural on a wall on Draper Road in Blacksburg. Bento designed the mural in cooperation with the Blacksburg Partnership, Montgomery County Tourism, 16 Blocks Magazine and the Town of Blacksburg.

Upcoming

June 25

Artist's Guide to Archival, Attractive and Affordable Framing

*Green Heron Art Center, Radford
6:30–8:30 p.m.*

This class, taught by Becky Lattuca, is geared toward artists and others trying to frame their own artwork, particularly for resale and exhibitions, in an attractive, yet economical manner. Fee is \$20. To register or for more information, contact Becky at 540-633-ARTS (2787) or greenheronart@yahoo.com.

June 28–29

*Watercolor Workshop by Sidra Kaluszka
Unitarian Universalist Church, Blacksburg
9 a.m.–4 p.m.*

A Blacksburg resident, Kaluszka holds a bachelor of fine arts from Virginia Tech and a master of fine arts from Radford University, with a double major in watercolor and ceramics. The cost is only \$50 for both days, and space is limited to 25 participants. Contact Nancy Norton (nancypnorton@comcast.net) to reserve your space.

July 19

*Delight Exhibit Opening Reception
VTLS, Inc., Corporate Research Center
5–7 p.m.*

Don't miss the reception for this joyful, BRAA-sponsored exhibit of 50 paintings representing artists' interpretations of delight. (See more information at Exhibit Opportunities on page 2.)

July 20

*Art on the Market
Downtown Blacksburg, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.*

This event is sponsored by Downtown Blacksburg, Inc., and is in conjunction with the annual Breakfast at the Farmers Market.

Bento *continued from page 1*

Through the LOVEwork project and her mural called "Loving Blacksburg," Bento created relationships with downtown merchants to sell reproductions of her mural and, hopefully, other pieces of public art, to help future artists have more ways to earn a living.

"To help with this process," said Bento, "I created a local website with links to all the good things happening in our community."

To meet Den, as many know her, is to meet a five-foot, wavy-haired dynamo constantly thinking about art, collaboration and her dream to open a children's art workshop in Blacksburg. She has a long list of credits upon which to build her dream.

Through her 15 years of professional creation in Mexico, according to Bento, she was recognized as one of the most innovative artists in her hometown of Mexico City, and



photo: Teri Hoover

Denisse Bento is surrounded by her artworks, including a miniature of her Blacksburg mural, in her studio in The Artful Place on Faculty Street in Blacksburg.

for a couple of years was chosen by the international media and marketing agency, Edelman, as the artistic representative of children in many socially responsible projects.

the top universities in Mexico City. That evolved into a traveling, interactive exhibit. "The exhibit was a social experiment allowing parents and children to interact with the artistic displays in ways that taught them to collaborate with an emphasis on society, environment and creative lifestyle," said Bento.

She was also the art director in several ecological and sustainable awareness projects throughout her country, opening a non-profit organization promoting the cleaning of rivers by "trading trash for food."

"Many places in the remote areas of Mexico have no efficient way of handling trash," Bento stated. "Because of that the people just dumped it into the rivers, creating very polluted conditions.

"In working with the children in one of my art projects, a child suggested people should be able to collect trash, turn it in at a collection point and be given food in return for their efforts, thereby giving them an incentive to handle the trash the right way.

"We pursued that idea in a small rural community and to this day in Mexico City, this project is still done with grains and vegetables being paid to the people turning in the trash. Many people have benefited from this exercise of awareness and it all started with art and children," said Bento.

Holding a degree in graphic design from the University of the New World in Mexico City, Bento took her natural art talents and disciplined them years before computers were the only way design was done. "My formal education taught me everything I needed to know to produce a finished product the old-fashioned way," said Bento. "If you made a mistake then, you had to start all over! Using computers helps me create graphic images that can be modified many times before the design is finalized."

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Exhibit Opportunities

Lavendar Festival

June 30

Beliveau Estate

5415 Gallion Ridge Road, Blacksburg

Artists are invited to paint plein air during the festival. There is no registration fee for the competition. More information and registration form available online at www.beliveauestate.com.

Delight Art Exhibition

July 19 – October 14

VTLS, Inc. at the Corporate Research Center, Blacksburg

The deadline is fast approaching for this BRAA-sponsored exhibit with a theme of "delight" in any wall-hung or 3-D medium. Entry fee is \$5 per piece (limit of two entries). Cash prize of \$50 will be awarded for Best of Theme based on voting at the opening reception.

Deadline is June 15, but work will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis (50 piece maximum). For entry form and more information, visit:

<http://www.blacksburgart.org/>

Art on the Market

July 20

Downtown Blacksburg

This annual event is sponsored by Downtown Blacksburg, Inc., and is offered in conjunction with Breakfast at the Farmers Market. Applications to exhibit are available at www.downtownblacksburg.com.

Steppin' Out 2013

August 2-3

Downtown Blacksburg

This street festival fills the downtown historic district with artists and craftspeople and three stages of music and entertainment. 16' x 10' spaces are \$150. For more information, visit www.BlacksburgSteppinOut.com.

Heritage Day

August 24

Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Regional Art Center, Christiansburg

Artists are invited to bring work to show and also work on site. The museum is also seeking donations of work for a silent auction. For more information, contact Sue Farrar at director@montgomerymuseum.org.

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Bento *continued from page 2*

Bento's personal art is full of color and sweeping lines. "For 10 years I dedicated much of my time researching ancient cultures in Mexico and Latin America," commented Bento. "That led me to the sort of art I do today and helps to promote the preservation of that ancient wisdom."

Because she still works first to create images by hand, then scans them to digital, her concepts and graphics, according to Bento, have been recognized as a form of art going beyond her designer profession. She still creates commissioned work from Mexico and now, in the US as a freelancer, she is generally involved in children's and community art projects through the BRAA and ARTSBURG, a collaborative effort to promote arts and cultural activities in Blacksburg; particularly those encouraging creative expression by children and youth. ARTSBURG was founded by the BRAA, the Black House and Cultural Center, the Perspective Gallery at Virginia Tech, the art supply store Mish Mish, CAIO Gallery and the Lyric Theatre, The Artful Lawyer and The Artful Place.

Bento's love for children led her, in the 1990's, to work in summer camps for children from all over the world through the Children's International Summer Villages (CISV).

"These camps were all about peace through friendship, collaboration, creativity, learning through play how to work in a team, developing a sense of social responsibility and community and of course art was a big part of each activity," said Bento. "After I graduated college, I spent a lot of time teaching arts to children and youth, as a means to integrate all these concepts from the camps."

All of Bento's experience working with children and art has led her to her dream of opening her "KUBO – Art Workshop for Kids." Kubo is the Spanish word for cube, and it represents a unique piece built by the cooperation of many sides. "Everything you can imagine can be added as a side to build up a cube of ideas," said Bento. "This collaboration through art is what I aim to share and teach through creativity with children, described Bento.

Bento, 36, is opening her art workshops inside The Artful Place, a working studio house established by James Creekmore of the Creekmore Law Firm in Blacksburg. "James, and his marketing director, Diana Francis, have been hugely helpful to me since I met them," reports Bento. "I simply would not be able to do what I am doing without them. My working studio is in their space and the KUBO Art Workshop for Kids will be there, too."

Bento will hold her first art workshop this month (June) with sessions for ages 6 to 18. During the summer, her workshops will be focused on mural production as a collaborative effort and, when complete, will be showcased in the KUBO as well as in other venues around Blacksburg.

"My classes will be small with only 4-10 students per session. Students will be motivated to observe themselves, their favorite aspects of life, imagine something that may be not only beautiful and artistic, but practical and useful," described Bento. "They will go through a thinking process to examine the steps beforehand, learn to sketch and view from different perspectives, make decisions and formulate a plan for getting from beginning to end, all in a game dynamic where the interaction between other students may help them enlarge their visions and achieve their purpose of creation through collaboration.

"This process will translate into every part of their lives, their work, their community as they grow up knowing how to imagine, plan, commit to and accomplish projects as individuals and as team members."



■ Now Showing

April 15 – July 15, 2013

(except where indicated otherwise)

Jeanette Bowker, Real Life Dental Care, 202 South Main Street, Blacksburg

Leslye Bloom, Warm Hearth Village, Blacksburg

Jeanette Bowker, Charlotte Chan, and **Nancy Norton**, Mill Mountain Coffee and Tea, 700 N. Main Street, Blacksburg

Charlotte Chan, Brown Insurance, 100 Hubbard Street, Blacksburg

Vanessa and Eugene Gorley, Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Regional Art Center, 300 S. Pepper Street, Christiansburg (through June)

Susan Hensley, Norris Hall, Virginia Tech campus

Delbert Jones, See Mark Optical, 2401 S. Main Street, Blacksburg

Fred Jones, StellarOne, Arbor Drive, Christiansburg

Carol McNamee, Holtzman Alumni Center, Virginia Tech campus (until September)

Diane Relf, Pita Vera, 235 N. Main Street, Blacksburg, VTLS, Inc., 1701 Kraft Drive, Blacksburg, and ICTAS, Virginia Tech campus (until mid-November)

Cecilia Riegert, ICTAS, Virginia Tech Campus (until mid-December)

Gerri Young, Zeppoli's, 810 University City Blvd., Blacksburg

■ Opportunities *continued from page 2*

2013 New River Art

October 2 – November 7

Perspective Gallery, Squires Student Center, Virginia Tech

If you only apply for one juried show in 2013, make this the one!

Entry for this biennial show is now open with a fully automated online submission process at www.callforentry.org.

The opening reception is 5–9 p.m. on Oct. 18.

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Helping Bento through all her projects is her husband, Herb Schneider, whom she met on an earlier visit to Blacksburg in 2001. Schneider and Bento discovered they shared the same dream and became long-distance friends for 10 years. They kept talking about community, sustainability and art projects, until 2011 when Den came to town to support Herb in their first joint community project called Convivium NRV. This project aims to strengthen community relationships through good conversations, all in a festive way.

They got married in 2012 and have been happily co-creating their dreams ever since. Always quick to laugh, Bento said, "I came to attend a community event and never left!"

Schneider is the quiet man behind and beside this powerhouse woman. When asked what it is like to keep up with Bento, he smiles and says, "I just hang on!"

Inspired to try his hand at art in his wife's studio, Schneider is every bit a partner in the process of getting Bento established as a graphic designer, helping out in whatever way necessary and often working long hours with her then going to his job. When Bento designed a mural for the children's dental room of the Free Clinic of the New River Valley (in conjunction with the BRAA and the Virginia Tech Center for the Arts), her husband wrote the music and lyrics for the little jingle featured in the design.

The dental clinic mural is just one example of Bento's incredible creativity. Within two minutes of being asked to participate in the project, she had drawn on a napkin what would become the mural kids now enjoy each time they visit the clinic.

To find more about Den's artwork, her children's art workshop and her other projects, go to www.denbento.com. ■

The art featured in this month's nameplate is "McDonald's Mill" (right, watercolor painted en plein air, 10x14") by Gerri Young. This and more of her work can currently be viewed at Zeppoli's.

Lunch, art spot and board meeting

The **June 14** luncheon is at 11:30 a.m. at **Famous Anthonys** in Blacksburg. The art talk begins at 12:15 and the board meeting will follow at 12:30 p.m. Please send agenda items to Robi Sallee at robisallee@hotmail.com.

The June art spot features Steven "Sketchy" White, well known as a very prolific sketch artist and now stretching out to oil landscapes painted plein air. Steve will demo his pochade box, some sketches and small oil paintings.

■ Upcoming *continued from page 1*

August 24

Heritage Day

Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Art Center, Christiansburg, 10 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

This event includes antiques, activities, art, food, and live music. Free admission.

October 18

New River Art Reception

Perspective Gallery, Squires Student Center, Virginia Tech Campus, 5–9 p.m.

Enjoy the winning entries in this biennial juried show.

October 19

What a Relief: How Prints are Made

Mary Holland, from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will be conducting a participative demo. Cost is \$10. Contact Nancy Norton (nancynorton@comcast.net) to register.

Thanks to **Mish Mish** for providing printed versions of this newsletter. Please support our local art supply store!



BRAA needs you

Within just a few months, BRAA will be electing officers for 2014. New leadership will be key to our continuing existence and vitality. Please seriously consider this and let Robi Sallee (robisallee@hotmail.com) know if you are willing to have your name placed in nomination for any of the offices—president, vice-president (president-elect and program coordinator), recording secretary, and treasurer. We have wonderful new social media tools and this newsletter to connect our members and others to BRAA. Our reputation is growing within the community as THE local arts association. Help BRAA keep building on this foundation to benefit both members and the community.



BRAA Officers

Robi Sallee, president
Nancy Norton, co-vice president
Danie Janov, co-vice president
Tom Barnhart, membership
Vikki King, treasurer



www.facebook.com/BlacksburgArt

Send Facebook news postings to:

Gerri Young at
younggerri@googlemail.com
 or **Nancy Norton**
 at nancypnorton@comcast.net

Twitter @BlackburgArt1

<http://www.blacksburgart.org/>

Send news, photos, comments, or newsletter suggestions to Lois Stephens (stephens1@pemt.net).