In this exhibition, artists talk through their hats

BY MARK JENKINS

Sometimes, a hat is just a hat. But not this month at Studio Gallery, where “Hats Off: Taking Art Outside the Gallery” entertainingly juxtaposes works by area artists with the toppers they made for local collector Steven Krensky. Most are light-colored fedoras embellished with designs that exemplify the artists’ styles, yet a few try with the very idea of a hat. Krensky curated the show, drawing on more than 50 lids made for him over the past 15 years.

The cap is integral to the piece in the gallery’s window — Stephen Herry’s life-size sculpture of a seated musician. Krensky (or the artist herself) has playfully turned one of Soula Arkin’s wire-sculptures “shadow drawings” into a hat rack for a chaise longue with shapes like the ones in the adjacent Arkin piece. Tory Cowles’s distinctive, broad-brimmed number, made of two very differently shaped pieces of metal, would be ideal for a flat-faced robot. The bulbous headpiece is Alison Sigley’s diving helmet, displayed next to two mixed-media pieces that evoke seashore depth, one with lights and the other with actual water.

Many of the hats are decorated with pictures of animals, from ants to an elephant. There’s a Disney cartoon live atop Nancy Never’s “Hear Pussy Rose,” and two fedoras with ancient Egyptian tomb art to Malik Lloyd’s blackboard lesson in the Afrocentric interpretation of Pharaohic Egpyt. Neary — geographically chronologically — Helen Zguard’s brightly striped entry complements a painting of a woman who has perched a fancy dress hat atop her black shroud. Among the abstractionists who successfully transfer their work from their shaped canvas are Anne Belmar and Pat Goslarski. His circles and dashed lines and her vivid biomorphic forms suit the hats contours. (Goslarski is married to Washington Post reporter Michael O’Sullivan.) Yet most of the artists, perhaps inspired by the practical nature of their assigned canvas, take a representational approach. That includes Soo Jun Heart, who tweaked the rules disarmingly by painting three pairs of shoes: one with autumn leaves, another with summer grass and the last with toes. After all, when taking art out of the gallery, footwear is even more important than headgear.

Hats Off: Taking Art Outside the Gallery Through Jan. 27 at Studio Gallery, 201 R St. NW. 202-232-8734. studio@wpoyt.com.

Tory Cowles, “1937 Electric,” mixed media, on exhibit in “Hats Off: Taking Art Outside the Gallery” at Studio Gallery.

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