

# THE DAILY GAZETTE

THE LOCALLY OWNED VOICE OF THE CAPITAL REGION

## an Artful Weekend



### Washington County Open Studios to put gourds, other work in the spotlight

BY WENDY LIBERATORE  
For The Daily Gazette

**T**he south room at Soul Space glows. Granted, the room is warm with sunlight streaming in from three sides. But it is the gilded gourd sculptures by Serena Kovalosky that really pop in the evening sun.

Kovalosky nods.

"You should see this room throughout the day. As the light goes around, it's absolutely stunning," said the artist who is among 15 showing at the third biennial Open Studios of Washington County. "I love to see the faces of the people who walk in the room. There is just a feeling of 'ah'. It's fabulous."

So too are the new large sculptures that Kovalosky has burnished and carved for the free tour that runs Saturday and Sunday throughout southern Washington County. She decided to create the larger pieces right after the last tour in 2009 as she felt that many collectors, who follow her through the tour, exhibitions and her blog, were ready for more dramatic pieces.

**COMMANDING ATTENTION**  
On a recent visit, the room at this Greenwich retreat had yet to be populated with all of her sculptures. Yet two large works stood proudly on the table. One is titled "Deep Mahogany." Unlike many of her pieces, this gourd is uncut. "It's trademark



"Keeper of the Fire" by Serena Kovalosky

gourd on the table. She is titled "Deep Mahogany." Unlike many of her pieces, this gourd is uncut. "It's trademark. Kovalosky, however, etched with intricate patterns, creating a grain the makes the gourd appear like wood. She then colored it to a dark amber stain with gold leaf. The sculpture, more than 2 feet tall, rests on a graceful wrought iron pedestal.

Its companion on the table is "Keeper of the Fire." The work, though smaller than "Deep Mahogany," demands attention. Split in its center and painted in gold leaf, the sculpture shimmers like a polished headdress for a princess.

She has smaller pieces available too – delicate, paper-thin bowls and vessels – all carved and painted. None of them look like gourds. Kovalosky laughs at that observation, especially since she never really wanted to be a gourd artist.

"I wanted to do intellectual sculptures," said Kovalosky, who is a native of Whitehall but spent most of her artistic life in Montreal. "I didn't want to sculpt gourds because I thought they were too crafty. But I kept coming back to them."

Thank goodness. Kovalosky's gourd creations are unique, certainly for the Northeast, where gourds, as art, are basically unheard of. But Kovalosky likes to point out that gourd art/craft has been around for centuries. Since ancient times in Africa and South America, gourds were used and decorated as bowls or cups. The art still thrives in the Southwest, which is good for Kovalosky, who does not grow gourds. She buys them from an organic grower in California who ships them to her already cleaned and dried.

"They come in large boxes from the UPS man," said Kovalosky. "He wonders what I have in the boxes because they are so light."

Once she gets them in her studio, she observes the gourd – waiting for it to speak to her. Then she goes to work.

She points to "Keeper of the Fire."

"I didn't want it to be all gilded. I thought it would be to gaudy," said Kovalosky. "But this is what it wanted."

The work was inspired by a 36-hour vigil she did with a fire keeper at a pow-wow.

"I wasn't even thinking about the fire keeper when I did this, but when I was finished, I knew that is what it was."



"Deep Mahogany" by Serena Kovalosky. The Greenwich sculpture/gourd artist will be part of the third annual Open Studios of Washington County this weekend.

gourd on the table. She is titled "Deep Mahogany." Unlike many of her pieces, this gourd is uncut. "It's trademark. Kovalosky, however, etched with intricate patterns, creating a grain the makes the gourd appear like wood. She then colored it to a dark amber stain with gold leaf. The sculpture, more than 2 feet tall, rests on a graceful wrought iron pedestal.

Its companion on the table is "Keeper of the Fire." The work, though smaller than "Deep Mahogany," demands attention. Split in its center and painted in gold leaf, the sculpture shimmers like a polished headdress for a princess.

She has smaller pieces available too – delicate, paper-thin bowls and vessels – all carved and painted. None of them look like gourds. Kovalosky laughs at that observation, especially since she never really wanted to be a gourd artist.

"I wanted to do intellectual sculptures," said Kovalosky, who is a native of Whitehall but spent most of her artistic life in Montreal. "I didn't want to sculpt gourds because I thought they were too crafty. But I kept coming back to them."

Thank goodness. Kovalosky's gourd creations are unique, certainly for the Northeast, where gourds, as art, are basically unheard of. But Kovalosky likes to point out that gourd art/craft has been around for centuries. Since ancient times in Africa and South America, gourds were used and decorated as bowls or cups. The art still thrives in the Southwest, which is good for Kovalosky, who does not grow gourds. She buys them from an organic grower in California who ships them to her already cleaned and dried.

"They come in large boxes from the UPS man," said Kovalosky. "He wonders what I have in the boxes because they are so light."

Once she gets them in her studio, she observes the gourd – waiting for it to speak to her. Then she goes to work.

She points to "Keeper of the Fire."

"I didn't want it to be all gilded. I thought it would be to gaudy," said Kovalosky. "But this is what it wanted."

The work was inspired by a 36-hour vigil she did with a fire keeper at a pow-wow.

"I wasn't even thinking about the fire keeper when I did this, but when I was finished, I knew that is what it was."

### FOLLOWING THE GOURD

Kovalosky calls her process organic, and says she will never force anything on her gourds/sculptures. In that way, she says her works maintain integrity.

Consider some recent commissions. She speaks with the buyers before she creates to find out what they are looking for. But if the gourd takes her in another direction, she follows that path, not the desires of the commissioner.

"Of course, if they don't like it, they don't have to buy it," she said.

Has that ever happened? "No," she said, and laughed.

During the weekend tour, which will also include artists Arleen Targan, Leslie Peck and Will Moses, Kovalosky will display the tools of her trade – a jigsaw, a Dremel, an X-Acto knife, a cleaning ball and a wood-burning pen. She looks forward to speaking with every guest.

While this is only the third year for the Open Studios Tour, its popularity has grown. Artists on the tour believe that art devotees enjoy interacting with artists and experiencing the rural environment that often inspires them. It's also a chance to spend the weekend exploring the bucolic byways of Washington County.

It's fabulous because people get to see the work in person and talk to the artists," said Kovalosky. "It's a more relaxed setting. It feels great. It's very rewarding."

BY WENDY LIBERATORE

For the Daily Gazette

Photo Credits: Jim McLaughlin Photography

### GREENWICH

The south room at Soul Space glows. Granted, the room is warm with sunlight streaming in from three sides. But it is the gilded gourd sculptures by Serena Kovalosky that really pop in the evening sun.

Kovalosky nods.

"You should see this room throughout the day. As the light goes around, it's absolutely stunning," said the artist who is among 15 showing at the third biennial Open Studios of Washington County. "I love to see the faces of the people who walk in the room. There is just a feeling of 'ah'. It's fabulous."

So too are the new large sculptures that Kovalosky has burnished and carved for the free tour that runs Saturday and Sunday throughout southern Washington County. She decided to create the larger pieces right after the last tour in 2009 as she felt that many collectors, who follow her through the tour, exhibitions and her blog, were ready for more dramatic pieces.

### COMMANDING ATTENTION

On a recent visit, the room at this Greenwich retreat had yet to be populated with all of her sculptures. Yet two large works stood proudly on the table. One is titled "Deep Mahogany." Unlike many of her pieces, this gourd is uncut. "It's trademark