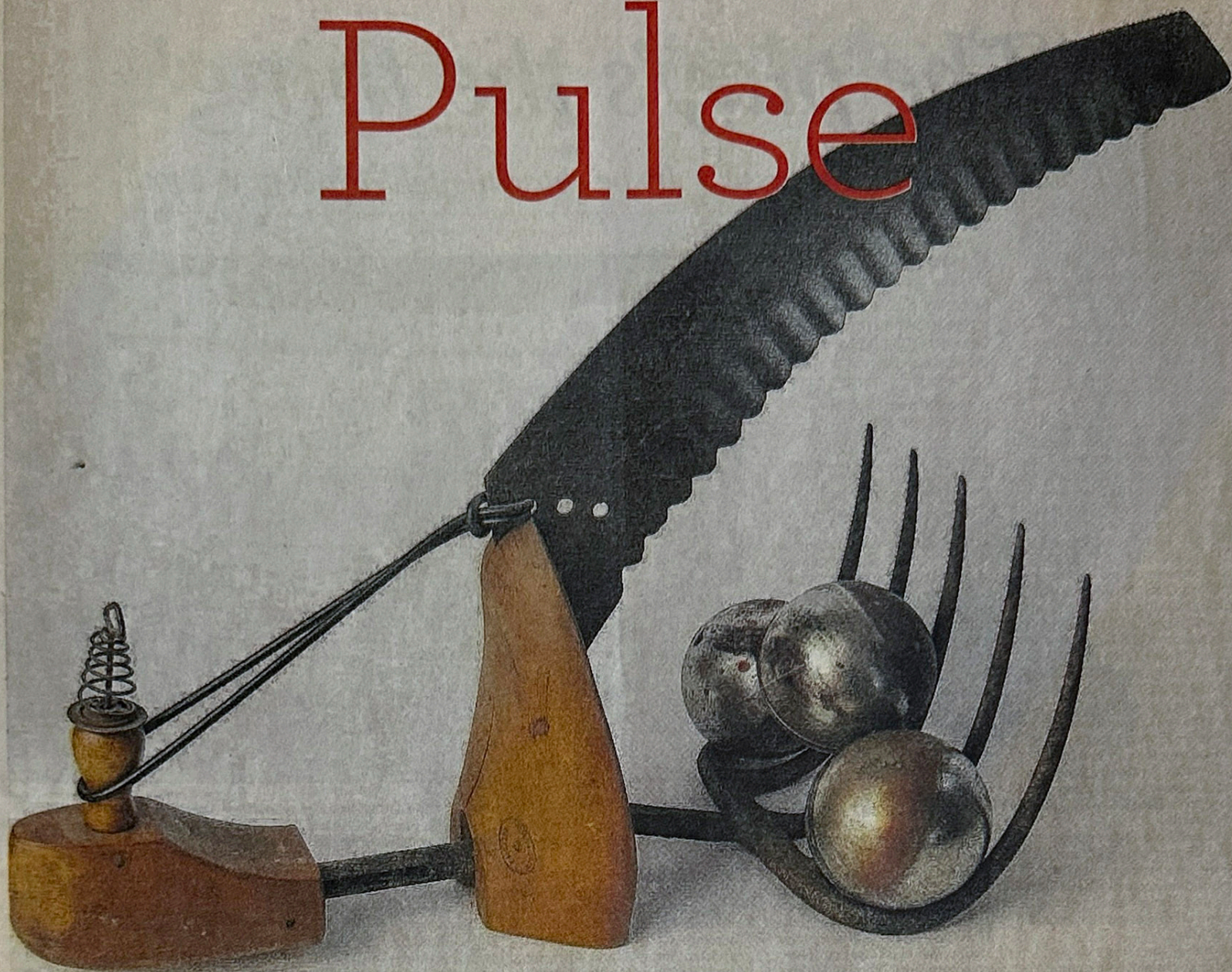


Pulse



Contributed photo

"Lost and Found Circus: A Creative Balancing Act," by Bridgeport artist Susan Tabachnick, will run at the Barnum Museum from Thursday, May 8, through Saturday, Aug. 30.

A different sort of circus

Found objects become sculptures as unique as characters under the big top

By Phyllis A.S. Boros

Junk.

It's the type of stuff that clutters our garages, attics, basements and garden sheds. Parts of old appliances, machines, motors, tools and hundreds of other doodads and industrial gizmos that are sometimes even spotted on the side of the highway, in the parking lot at the mall, in the street gutters in front of our homes and apartments.

Or on the sidewalk.

On a 2006 stroll with her dog, Lola, through her Stratfield Historic District neighborhood in Bridgeport, Susan Tabachnick spied a round metal flange on the path. Rather than ignore it, she picked it up, brought it home and placed it on a window sill above the kitchen sink, she recalled in a recent telephone chat.

That one piece of detritus caught her eye — and her imagination. And led to her continuing passion: creating sculpture from salvaged and found items.

"After that, I started noticing things when I was out and about — usually small industrial pieces that caught my eye. Most often I didn't know what they were, but was simply drawn to their shape or texture or aged coloration," she said, adding that at the time, she didn't consider herself an artist. (Tabachnick had majored in English and secondary education in college,

followed by about 25 years working for Reed Exhibitions in Norwalk, a trade and consumer events organizer. She was for many years the global company's marketing director.)

"The next piece I acquired was a copper toilet float; it nested perfectly atop the flange. I was intrigued by the idea that these objects fit together as if they 'belonged,' and conveyed their own new personalities. Soon I had gathered a collection of interesting objects, mostly metal, and mostly industrial parts and tools that weren't created to be beautiful, but nonetheless had an aesthetic appeal. These became my toys and 'building blocks' in a campaign to infuse new life into old objects.

Since then, she has created scores of sculptures and, amazingly, none of their parts are permanently joined. Instead, each piece relies on "fit or balance" to achieve a particular look.

"I found one-of-a-kind items at estate sales, such as special-purpose and custom-made tools, which, in my eyes, begged to become something new and altogether different. Their shape, size, material and color instructed how they came together, but I did not force the unions," she writes in her artist's statement.

About 50 of Tabachnick's sculptures will be on view in "Lost and Found Circus: A Creative Balancing Act" at Bridgeport's Barnum Museum. (None will be available for purchase because they are part of her private collection.)

The artist, who was born in Stamford, said she "never intended to make a circus."

"Often the pieces came together serendipitously, each with its own eccentric personality, not unlike that of traditional circus characters. The circus theme percolated as I continued to make sculptures. Eventually, I began to place my assemblages on the mantelpiece, where I could see them at eye level, a circus troupe parading against the golden-hued background of a painted wall."

Why a circus? The answer for Tabachnick lies in great memories from growing up in Bridgeport.

"To me, the most important part of the circus is the experience of its arrival, with the anticipation of a parade of circus wagons coming down the streets" as it proceeded, in those days, to the tent at Seaside Park.

"Every year around the Fourth of July ... the Barnum Festival parade takes place in my old neighborhood. Like an old-fashioned circus, they gather early in the morning on the next block over, and I vividly remember the floats coming down the street where I used to live. I would sit on my front porch and watch 'the show before the show.' It was quiet and wonderful. This is what I think of as my work evolves," she said.

pasboros@ctpost.com; Twitter @PhyllisASBoros

» **If you go:** The Barnum Museum, 820 Main St., Bridgeport. In the modern People's United Bank Gallery. Entry is at the left rear of the historic building (which is closed for tornado damage repairs). Hours, May 8 through Aug. 30, are: Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Free admission, although donations are appreciated. Special hours Wednesday, July 16, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. for "Artist in Residence Workshop: Inventive Play." Suggested workshop cost is \$5 per family. 203-331-1104, ext. 100; www.barnum-museum.org.

Art to the Avenue: Commerce and creativity meet along one of the country's best-known shopping destinations. Page 4



Art Show: Cuban artists featured. Page 3



Book Beat: Romance is in the air. Page 4

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