

FRED TORRES COLLABORATIONS

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By CAMILLIA LANHAM Bigfork Eagle

Gretchen Ryan's *Between Landscape and Spirit*, Reviewed

Bigfork's newest art gallery is designed to show off the art it plans to bring to downtown's art scene. Simple yet modern, its white walls glare over one table on a newly finished wooden floor.

The paintings hang exactly between roof and floor — a row of color that pops from one piece to the next, drawing the eye to breath in context and the mind to contemplate work that seems to drip with social commentary.

They are the work of Los Angeles based painter Gretchen Ryan. Her show of colorful pageant girls opened on Friday night along with Bigfork Collaborations. Ryan's is just one artistic style of many the Bigfork Collaborations director, James Parmenter, has plans to show off in the new gallery.



“The innocence, the color, it's a show you can appreciate on a technical level and a spiritual level,” Parmenter said. “It's a perfect first show for Bigfork.”

His vision for Bigfork Collaborations is one of workshops and art education, a place to view art never before seen in western Montana and a spot where Bigfork artists can hang their work next to that of world renowned artists.

It's also the perfect starting point for Parmenter and his art career because Bigfork is where Parmenter spent a good portion of his childhood.

“Bigfork has sort of always been a second home,” Parmenter said.

Parmenter's family lived in Bigfork until he was 10. They moved to Houston before settling down in Missoula. Parmenter's grandparents stayed in Bigfork, and he remembers visiting them regularly.

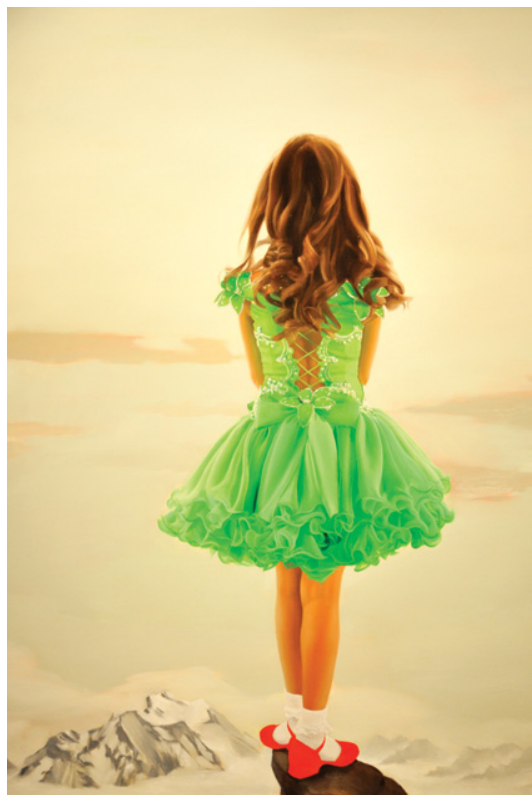
Parmenter's grandmother was Donna Paulson, who owned Paulson Real Estate and passed away in 2004. His grandfather is Jack Paulson, who sold Fred Torres Collaborations out of New York the space that Bigfork Collaborations now inhabits on the ground floor of Twin Birch Square.

Fred Torres Collaborations is a gallery, artist refuge, workshop space and education library that works with galleries around the world to set up shows for the artists Torres represents. He represents Ryan, who has been featured in exhibitions around the world since 1998, along with artists like rock star turned artist Courtney Love.

The two galleries will work in collaboration to bring in a mix of Torres represented artists, Bigfork artists and other international artists.

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Gretchen Ryan, Untitled, 2012, oil on linen over panel, 40 x 28 inches

“My grandparents’ dream was for me to have a fine art gallery in Bigfork,” Parmenter said. “And then this opportunity presented itself.”

Unfortunately the opportunity didn’t present itself with ease, but rather with heartbreak. Parmenter was living in New York when his younger brother passed away in March 2012. The death brought him back to Bigfork and pushed him toward a path he knew he should follow.

“It was basically a kick in the pants to get back on track,” Parmenter said.

After attending the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and graduating in 2009 with a Bachelor’s in Fine Arts, Parmenter traveled to Korea to teach English before moving to New York to pursue art once again.

He met Torres just months before his brother passed away. Bigfork Collaborations started to fall into place after the funeral when Torres purchased the space in Bigfork and encouraged Parmenter to pursue his dream of art.

“Between Landscape and Spirit” will run through January

24. It offers a snapshot of Ryan’s body of work centered around the life of young pageant girls and animal rights.

The next show “The Earth Laughs in Flowers,” will begin on Feb. 14. Bigfork Collaborations is asking Bigfork artists to submit work created specifically for the show.

“We think it would be nice to see a lot of color when it’s so bleak,” Parmenter said.

Even though Bigfork Collaborations plans on displaying local artists’ work, Parmenter thinks what they are offering is such a unique slice of the art world that it won’t be in direct competition with other galleries downtown.

As a starting point for all of the shows he curates for Bigfork Collaborations, Parmenter keeps a reminder of his brother on the back wall in the form of a painting by Joe Andoe. It’s a riderless horse that serves as a universal symbol of the lost. For Parmenter it’s a symbol that something big can come from great personal loss.

“I know out of tragedy comes creativity,” Parmenter said.

