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By REBECCA DRAVIS

No parking. No skateboarding. No loitering. Sign, sign, everywhere a sign in downtown Pittsfield — and most of them are pretty negative.

Until now. Now, sprinkled amid the signs of urban law and order are signs of life.

Smile. Celebrate. Look. Laugh. Play.

The signs are the brainchild of Connecticut artist June Bisantz, who hung 19 of her creations around downtown last Friday as part of this year's edition of ArtScape, Pittsfield's series of ongoing public art projects. They will stay up for a year.

Bisantz said the "Signs of Life" have been displayed in public before, in a New Haven, Conn., outdoor space dedicated to art. This time, though, the signs are mixed in with real signs to create some rather unexpected juxtapositions.

"This is very exciting to me because they're actually in the street," Bisantz said as she roamed North Street watching Department of Public Works employee Joe Cimini do the actual hanging of the colorful, playful signs.

Bisantz, an artist and musician who teaches digital art and design at Eastern Connecticut State University, said the public aspect of the exhibit is what drew her to submit a proposal. She believes art should be accessible to everyone, not just those likely to enter a gallery or museum.

"We shouldn't get confused and think art isn't for everyone," she said, adding that the true purpose of art is to "make us feel less alone" in life.

"That's what I'm in it for. That connection," she said.

Megan Whilden, Pittsfield's director of Cultural Development, said ideas like the signs are the reason Pittsfield is so keen on displays of public art — from painted sheep to baseball signs, just to name a recent couple.

I saw the SIGN

New Pittsfield public art exhibit puts some happy thoughts on display



PHOTO BY REBECCA DRAVIS
Pittsfield Department of Public Works employee Joe Cimini hangs one of Connecticut artist June Bisantz' 19 signs that will hang around downtown Pittsfield for the next year. For more photos, visit advocateweekly.com.



"It provides access to the arts for everyone," she said. "I love accessible, interesting art and things that make people smile."

With that in mind, Whilden hand-picked the specific locations for each sign. For example, she thought the "Think" sign would be particularly appropriate in front of the Juvenile Court building. And, after some discussion, a last-minute switch put the "Meet Here" sign next to the clock in front of the Legacy Banks building at North and Depot — because Whilden told Bisantz "the clock" is where people often connect with each other.

The switch was OK with Bisantz. As Cimini hung the last sign — the "Meet Here" sign — Bisantz said over the course of the year she might decide there were better places for other signs, too, as she became more familiar with Pittsfield.

And so she warned Cimini his sign-hanging days might not be through.

"Joe, you might be hearing from me," she said.



PHOTO BY REBECCA DRAVIS
Connecticut artist June Bisantz believes her signs, hanging in downtown Pittsfield, make art more accessible to the average person.

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