

**M**ovieArt

# Selling Herself On Screen

With her cinema series project, public artist June Bisantz turns the focus on herself (and us)

By LuAnne Roy

**Art Replaces Advertising**

Runs through June 8 (all shows in all theaters) at Crown Plaza, 2 Railroad Ave., Greenwich, (203) 869-4030; Crown Majestic Theater, 118 Summer St., Stamford, (203) 323-1690; Crown Royale, 542 Westport Ave., Norwalk, (203) 846-8797. Runs through June 22 at Bethel Cinema, 269 Greenwood Ave., Bethel, (203) 778-2100.

**T**he time for the screening of *The American Haunting* at Norwalk's Crown Royale Theatre was 8 p.m. But when I looked at my watch as the opening credits started, I noted that it was 8:16. That meant the audience had to endure 16 minutes of ads and previews.

The first was a familiar TV commercial for American Express starring Kate Winslet, another was one of those Mazda "zoom, zoom, zoom" ads that depict a car speeding around curves on a treacherous mountain road. Seen that a million times before. Others promoted cable TV with coming attractions for specials on The Discovery Channel and The Learning Channel. Then there were several movie previews, followed by a long parade of public service announcements by the theater—one for the concession stand, others warning about talking, smoking and cell phones. And before that, while the lights were still up, a projector ran through a series of slides promoting local businesses. And, of course there were the typical "Scramblers" that let you idle away the time unscrambling famous actors' names. Ho-hum.

But every so often, amidst the commercial ads, a color-

while another utilized billboards in northern Connecticut (the artist resides in Willimantic) and up through the Berkshires to North Adams, Mass.

Bisantz, who began as a painter, says she started her public art campaign in 1999 because she wanted to make art more accessible.

"We need a certain amount of art in our lives to be

Bisantz says public art also allows her to connect with the public, and break the cycle of corporate tedium that's overtaken our lives. By putting art in the same places as advertising, and making it appear almost as if it is an advertisement itself, it begs people to ask, "What does that mean?"

In the cinema art series, she wants to encourage people to redirect the focus on themselves, to imagine themselves as stars of their own lives. Even though her images are each only shown for 10 seconds, she feels it's enough to get people to think.

As world events spin out of control, Bisantz says the public retreats to a fascination with the lives of celebrities.

"Our lives are far more interesting," she asserts. "After all, they're our lives!"

In all of her cinema series pieces, Bisantz is the star. Each mock ad reflects a momentous occasion in her life or an emotional state she's experienced. She tells her story through classical motifs celebrating popular movie genres of the '40s, each one representing a universally-recognized scenario that's meant to translate into a personal message.

In one titled "High Stakes," she parodies the classic Western, portraying a Mexican bandit with a

sombrero on her head, a bandana over her face, and wielding two smoking guns pointed at the audience. The underlying theme involves facing confrontation and taking risks. One of her more recently conceived images, called "Hot Pursuit," resembles the cover of a romance novel, with Bisantz crouching in the shadow of the moonlight, the swooning heroine, gazing up at a handsome man. He's actually a photographer named Harrison Judd, Bisantz' fiancé. "It's autobiographical," remarks Bisantz, laughing, "[It's] the high romance adventure of me and my fiancé... it's my way of introducing Harrison."

Just as Bisantz portrays herself as the heroine, she hopes people will reflect on their own life dramas. The movie poster images are "meant to encourage people."

As she says, "It's not about stars like Angelina Jolie and Jennifer Aniston." It's about us. Movie theater "machines" play down the individual, while building up those with wealth and stardom. "This is a humorous comment," she says of her cinema art, hinting that a little self-parody may be just what the rest of us need.



Artist June Bisantz plays the swooning heroine in one of her 10-minute mock movie ads.

happy," she says. "It's not just for the privileged few... we shouldn't have to travel across the world [or to New York City] to see it."

**It's not about stars like Angelina Jolie and Jennifer Aniston. It's about us.**

ful slide would appear to break the monotony of the intrusive propaganda, an image that resembled a vintage movie poster. Three different ones circulated with the "regular" ads, each with the bold title "Coming Soon!" emblazoned across the top left corner. What movie-goers may not have realized is that these images were not plugging real movies or endorsing any products. They were the subversive work of public art queen June Bisantz.

People in the greater Hartford area may be more familiar with her public art attacks. One of her earlier projects involved displaying artwork on the sides of city buses,

As an artist, she says she was also tired of playing the competitive gallery exhibition game.

"I refuse to be relegated to a museum," she asserts, adding, "I want a direct route... I don't want to wait for a curator to like my work."

And Bisantz likes the idea of seeing art in places where it's unexpected. Especially in spaces usually designated for advertising.

"It opens people's minds," she says. Art provides a thought-provoking background to everyday industrial images and noise pollution. "It's my drop in the bucket."