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▷ Bethel Cinema to exhibit screen art

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Gone are the live-action commercials at Bethel Cinema. Still slides with advertisements of local businesses now cycle on the screen before a movie. And soon, mixed in with the ads that are displayed when the lights are still on, will be images by a Willimantic based digital artist, June Bisantz, in a public art exhibit titled "Coming Soon!!"

The exhibit, which will run from April 28 to June 8, is funded by two grants, from Connecticut State University and Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism. It will appear in seven movie theaters in Connecticut.

It is about "anticipation and desire," explained Bisantz, 57, a digital art and design teacher at Eastern Connecticut State University.

Her artwork has appeared in over 40 solo and group exhibitions from Soho to galleries and other venues in Connecticut, including at The University of Connecticut and the Discovery Museum in Bridgeport.

But in 1999, with grant funding, Bisantz moved her work to the public realm by making use of billboards and buses, mostly in the greater Hartford area. Her largest exhibition appeared on 25 billboards and 17 buses in towns and cities across the state from Willimantic, through Hartford and in to North Adams, Mass.

The upcoming exhibit is a way for the artist to reach a larger audience and make use of movie screen advertising space to make a "personal connection" with many more people, she said.

Its title refers to an "anticipation of exciting things to come and the power of creative action to connect us to our own personal journeys", according to an

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Willimantic artist June Bisantz appears in two images from her exhibit, "Coming Soon!!" which will appear at Bethel Cinema and seven other Connecticut movie theaters this spring.

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explanation on her Web site, ArtReplacesAdvertising.com.

Three images are part of the exhibit, all in a style of vintage movie posters, each casting Bisantz as the central character.

They are vignettes that represent several themes, "high stakes, adventure and reward" and a reminder to the artist and others to "connect with our own lives," she said in an interview.

Bisantz's work blends art, performance and media advertising, she said, a way for her to become part of her own "cultural fantasy and become a media star," but also to impart a "creative connection" with the mass media, to others.

"Hopefully, it's for enjoyment, also self-empowerment," she said. "The focus is on the fact that as we admire the heroic stories we see on the big screen, it's to

remind ourselves we're the hero of our own drama."

The image "High Stakes," which has the artist dressed as a Mexican cowboy and holding two smoking guns, is a scene of "heroic confrontation," she said.

"The stakes are high in the choices we make in our lives," she said. "It's the old saying: You need to pay attention. You need to be doing something you are passionate about. For example, if we choose the wrong career the stakes are high."

The other images are "Hot Pursuit," a scene of romance and adventure, that casts Bisantz as a 1940s movie heroine and also casts her real-life fiancé, Harrison Judd, a photographer and artist.

Another image of Bisantz, looking glamorous but wearing a white captain's cap, reminiscent of the Andrews sisters in old feel-good war films, depicts "anticipation and desire" she said.

"It adds cultural richness to our community," said Bethel Cinema owner Pam Karpen of the upcoming exhibit.

"When we first took over the theater (in January) we eliminated live action commercials and just kept the slide advertising of local businesses," Karpen said. "It's fabulous because we are an art house and this plays to our local audiences."

Bisantz has a masters of fine arts in painting from Claremont Graduate University in California. She has lived and worked in Boston, Los Angeles and New York City. Her work as a commercial artist and illustrator has appeared in Esquire and Vanity Fair magazines and her paintings, collages and multimedia pieces have been shown in galleries and museums nationally and internationally, including The Copley Society of Art in Boston, the Kohn Turner Gallery in Los Angeles and Gallerie Alexi in Budapest. She moved to Connecticut in 1990.