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EMAIL: INFO@CLIFTONBENEVENTO.COM WEBSITE: WWW.CLIFTONBENEVENTO.COM**VERMONT'S INDEPENDENT VOICE**
SEVEN DAYS**Art Review: Polly Apfelbaum, BCA Center**

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Wallpaper isn't exactly making a comeback in the average home, but it is a major component of the latest exhibit at the BCA Center in Burlington, an installation by Polly Apfelbaum titled "Evergreen Blueshoes." Every wall of the gallery, front room and back, is covered with a

repeating pattern on wide sheets of paper. When you walk in, you immediately get the sense of being hugged by green, owing to the paper's depiction of lush foliage. It makes the gallery feel cozy. So do the two large, hand-woven rugs — one green, one blue — on the floor of each room.

Then you realize that the repeating pattern on the walls includes naked people. Rows and rows of them. They are young, beautiful flower children frolicking in nature like happy pagans. Stoned as newts, you might think if you're old enough to know what "flower child" means.

Apfelbaum did find inspiration for this work in a late '60s artifact: the album cover of an LA folk-rock band called, yes, Evergreen Blueshoes. She even modeled her graphics after its psychedelic typeface. But the New York-based artist didn't aim to induce a green-blue druggie haze, or even necessarily to invoke nostalgia for a hippie heyday. Rather, Apfelbaum associates this image of a halcyon time with "my idea of Vermont," she said last Friday in an interview before the exhibit's opening. Whether warranted or



not, her conception of the state is a place where the social and political ideals of the 1960s actually came to fruition. Plus, it's green.

"I wanted to focus on a sense of place," the artist said, noting the renewed momentum

of "back-to-the-land, food, farming ... there is a serious alternative movement here."

Apfelbaum has lived in New York since 1978, and spent time in Rome, Italy, including at the American Academy as the 2012-13 recipient of the coveted Joseph H. Hazen Rome Prize. But she is not just a city dweller with a rhapsodic view of Vermont. She spent a number of summers here in her youth, including stints at Plymouth's Farm & Wilderness camps — "That had a real impact on my life," she said — as well as during her college years.

Some viewers may still find Apfelbaum's artistic idyll a bit naïve, her concept too narrow or dated. But they would do well to remember that this show isn't really "about" Vermont or the swinging '60s; it's about art making and the dialog it evokes. And if this installation seems simple at first glance — just wallpaper and rugs — in fact it was labor intensive. But in this case, the artist admitted it was mostly someone else's labor. "My energy went into the thinking rather than the working," she said.

Though Apfelbaum attests to a love of craft, including ceramics and weaving, the wool rugs at BCA were dyed and hand woven, over five months, in Mexico. She conceived the idea for the wall covering, scanned and manipulated the image — and then turned it over to a manufacturer.

Hanging the paper was the hard part. When you peer closely to find the seams, you appreciate just how difficult it is to match one sheet exactly with the next, and the next — and you understand why wallpaper isn't making a comeback. Apfelbaum gave due credit to the BCA staff for an impeccable installation. And, in keeping with both her crafty

notions and cheerful spirit, she kept busy in the gallery by threading beads onto string, making necklaces for all comers. "I like the idea of visitors getting a souvenir," she explained.

Apfelbaum noted that the work in "Evergreen Blueshoes" is a bit of a departure for her. "I think of myself as an abstract artist," she said. At the American Academy, for example, she focused on formal explorations of color in works on paper and fabrics. But there, too, she showed the pieces by laying them on the floor, melding form and function, gallery and home, fine art and craft.

"Evergreen Blueshoes" is in line with Apfelbaum's long-held interest in pop and color-field art. That manifests in her use of almost hypnotic repetition — multiple nudes in a sea of green, like a visual mantra — and in the large rectangles of color on the floor. Apfelbaum considers the rugs to be paintings in their own right. As such, they are paintings that invite you to sit on them, perhaps even lie down, and contemplate the trippy wallpaper.

Asked what captivated her about that album art, Apfelbaum paused thoughtfully and then replied, "I thought it was funny. It's joyous but also very odd." She also liked the color and the attitude. "There really is a narrative here," she added. "I like thinking about that story."

Two notes to visitors: This exhibit requires that you remove your shoes at the door, so you can walk on the rugs. And the naked-people photography is so dreamily unfocused that no offending sexy bits appear, so parents with youngsters need not stay away. Indeed, at the opening reception last Friday, clusters of kids romped on the carpets just as happily as the "children" on the walls. The outbreak of youthful, unfettered exuberance seemed to be exactly what Apfelbaum intended.

"Evergreen Blueshoes," installation by Polly Apfelbaum, BCA Center in Burlington. Through June 7. burlingtoncityarts.org