

Cincinnati arts news you need to know this week

David Lyman | Special to Cincinnati Enquirer | Published 10:00pm ET April 22, 2021

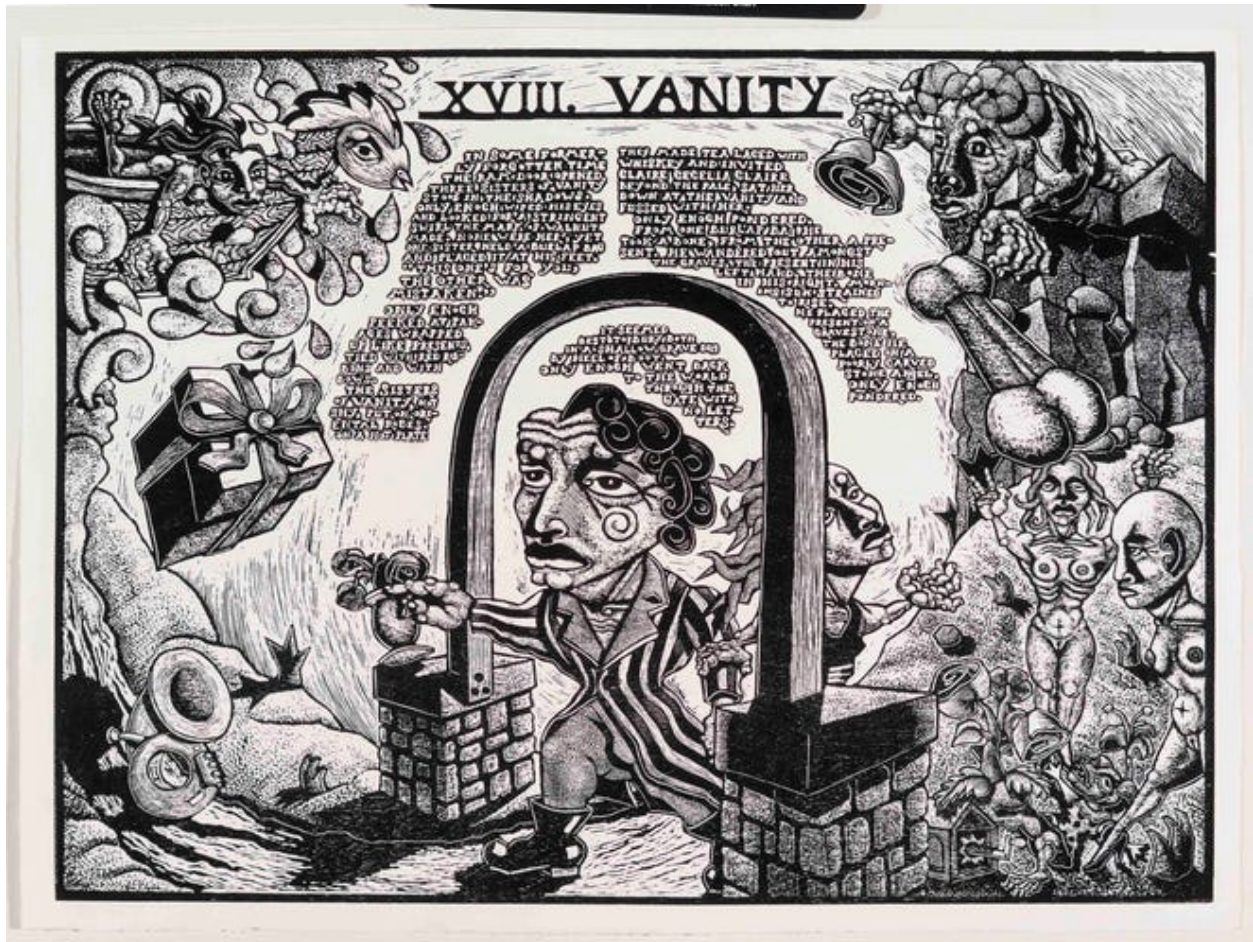


Do a Google search on “Jay Bolotin” and you’ll find results that seems to describe three – maybe four – artists. “Legendary singer-songwriter,” says one headline. “Renaissance artist,” crowns another. One even calls him “an American treasure.” There are references to him as a photographer, too, and as an author and sculptor. And as a masterful and extraordinary creator of woodcut prints.

On April 30, the Carl Solway Gallery opens an exhibition that spans 45 years of Bolotin’s work in a broad range of media. There are brand new works – the “L Portfolio” and “The Book of Only Enoch” – and older ones, including “No One Seems to Notice That It’s Raining,” his 2018 LP of previously unrecorded songs written between 1970 and 1975.

But to me, at least, it is those remarkable woodcuts that are most memorable. Sometimes, looking at them is like discovering art that has arrived from some alternate universe. Dense, almost cluttered with images

and words, they are the sort of pieces that demand you spend time with them, fully digesting them before moving on to the next.



Bolotin's background is as fascinating as his work. Depending on which story you choose to read, you may learn about his music being championed by the likes of Kris Kristofferson and Merle Haggard. Or about him performing in legendary New York clubs like the Bitter End and Folk City. Or developing massive multimedia theater productions. Or spending weekends with his Lithuanian grandmother and listening to her speak Russian and Yiddish while playing recordings of her favorite Cantors.

Photos of Bolotin look like they could have been lifted from the archives of a 19th century photographer rambling the backroads of eastern Kentucky.

Whichever version of Jay Bolotin you choose to focus on, it's worth going to see his work in person. It's intense and captivating and, on occasion, perplexing.

Bolotin's show opens 6-8 p.m. on April 30 and runs through Aug. 28 at the Carl Solway Gallery, 424 Findlay St., West End, 513-621-0069.



World record

It's a long way off, but the 2022 Fotofocus Biennial is worth the wait.

The sprawling photography-based event will take scores of exhibits under its broad curatorial umbrella. Most will be modest-sized. But with this week's announcement of the biennial's theme – “World Record” – organizers also announced a handful of major exhibitions, as well.

Several are solo exhibits; New York-based artist Baseera Khan at the Contemporary Arts Center and a large site-specific work by Australian transdisciplinary artist Ian Strange. Others are group exhibitions, like “Images

on which to build,” curated by writer and independent curator Ariel Goldberg. Running at the Contemporary Arts Center, the exhibit employs various types of photographic displays “to understand spaces for learning within LGBTQ and feminist grassroots activism of the 1970-1990s.”

Fotofocus will take place in October 2022 and involves all manner of local galleries, museums and other spaces. For more detailed information about the event, go to www.fotofocus.org/biennial/2022.

60-minute Shakespeare

For all theatergoers, the pandemic has been a bleak period. The logjam is starting to break up, with community theaters leading the way with live productions. TriCounty Players, for instance, opens J.B. Priestley’s “An Inspector Calls” at the Theater at Bell Tower Arts Pavilion on May 7. (bit.ly/3emicQO for information).

But if you’ve had a hankering for some Shakespeare, it’s been tough going.

Thanks to an ambitious collaboration between Cincinnati Shakespeare Company and WVXU-FM, though, there is a growing online library of one-hour productions of some of Shakespeare’s finest. The “Second Sunday Shakespeare Series” adds a new production each month. The production debuts live on WVXU and then is available for online streaming after that.

The most recent addition was “Much Ado About Nothing,” which debuted on April 19. It will be online indefinitely at cincyshakes.com/event/much-ado-radio, according to CincyShakes. Over the next few months, we’ll get to hear “Macbeth” (May), “The Merry Wives of Windsor” (June), “Henry V” (July) and so on through the rest of the year. The list of upcoming productions is online at cincyshakes.com/WVXU.