

In the 1970's, Harvard Square in Cambridge reigned as one of the intellectual capitals of the world. With one of the highest concentrations of independent booksellers in the nation, it drew countless visitors eager to enrich themselves with books, magazines and publications from the four corners of the earth. For architect Branko Brankovic and his wife, artist Angela Vinkler-Petrovic, however, there was a gaping hole in this universe.

"In 1976, there were only books in Harvard Square," exclaims Vinkler-Petrovic. "The area needed an art gallery!"

The two set out to rectify this situation. They opened BAAK Gallery, the first independent art gallery in the Square, originally housed on Church Street in what is now the Cambridge Artists' Cooperative. They sought out American and European artists who breathed new life into the Cambridge art scene. Shows changed monthly, and fine art in the Square became a reality.

Six years later, BAAK Gallery's founders began to carry jewelry to supplement their fine arts offerings. Eventually, designer jewelry by American and international craftspeople completely took over the gallery, even after Brankovic and Vinkler-Petrovic moved, in 1991, to their current location on Brattle Street. Five years ago, they seized the opportunity to acquire retail space next door, and broke through in order to create a space that would showcase art as well as jewelry. Once again, art and fine jewelry could coexist gracefully at the BAAK.

However, the demands of a retail store and their other interests hampered the founders' efforts to incorporate art in the way they desired. The art gallery needed a full-time champion. In December 2005, they hired Montserrat

College of Art graduate Catalina Viejo Lopez de Roda as gallery curator.

Viejo Lopez de Roda grew up in Spain, went to high school in Dublin, and then came to the United States for her undergraduate degree in art. She brings to the gallery what she terms an "open eye," and a commitment to innovative art. Under her creative direction, BAAK Gallery has returned to its roots as a place to find energetic work from contemporary New England artists, many who are just emerging onto the local art scene.

"We're looking for things that are different and original," Viejo Lopez de Roda explains. "We want art that is uncommon, even within standard media. Because the gallery is so small, we can't have sculpture here, but we are looking for a three-dimensional quality in the art we show."

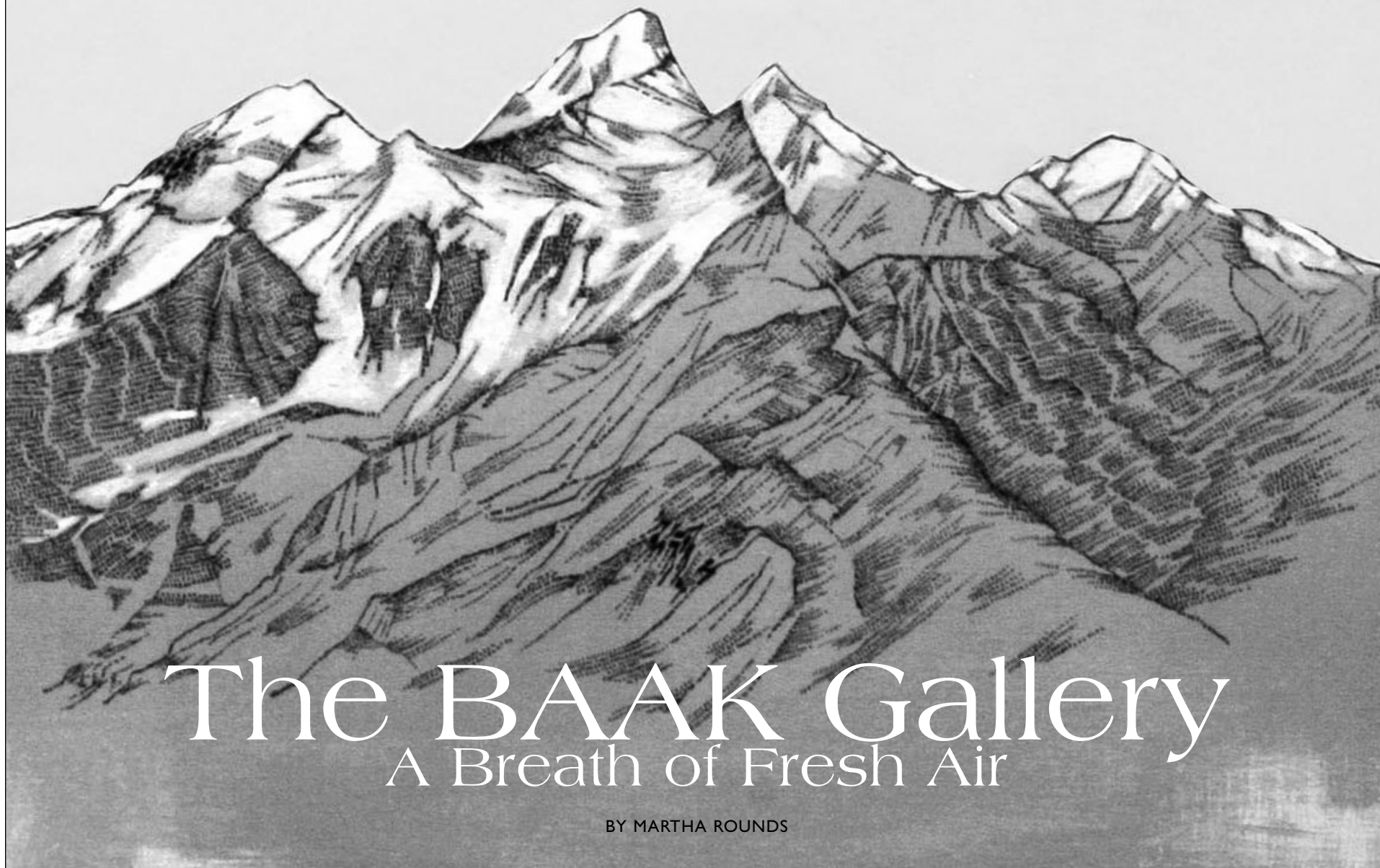
*The Diverse Landscape – Group Exhibition*, on display May 10 – June 6, features four artists who strive to connect viewers with their impressions, experiences and memories of the landscapes they depict. Though the artists' media, techniques and vision differ dramatically from one another, each captures a sense of landscape as a highly personal experience. Not only do they want to place the viewer in their landscapes, says Viejo Lopez de Roda; they urge the viewer to be part of their experience with that landscape. Each landscape inexorably draws the viewer into the artist's unique, individual reality.

The landscapes are small, none larger than 22" x 26", and their size encourages the viewer to draw close, to enter the artists' individual worlds. Aaron Bouvier's deep-toned skyscapes in charcoal and latex and acrylic paint on masonite panels capture the infinite, ethereal

beauty of clouds and sky. In contrast, Michael Wells uses acrylic, charcoal and markers on panels to capture his impressions: one mountain quietly looms, distant and impersonal, while in another work, a volcano screams "RUN" in the fiery, threatening, red smoke that spews from within. Though at first glance they seem abstract, oil paintings by Barbara Hadden depict colorful landscapes that somehow pull the viewer into a deep, confusing and chaotic forest. Subtle text emerges from Kristen Johnson's monochromatic skies done in charcoal, inks and oil; she challenges the viewer with specific thoughts that emerged as she worked. Taken together, the four artists capture multiple layers of thought, action and meaning for artist and viewer alike.

Though many of the original bookstores have left and other galleries welcomed to the Square, the BAAK Gallery has revived the tradition it began three decades ago. Once again, shows change every four weeks; every show strives to challenge and stimulate the viewer. *The Diverse Landscape – Group Exhibition* emphasizes the BAAK Gallery's determination to bring groundbreaking new art to the streets of Harvard Square.

You may contact the BAAK Gallery, 35 Brattle Street, Cambridge, at 617.354.0407, or visit [www.baakgallery.com](http://www.baakgallery.com). Hours are Monday-Saturday 10:30am to 8pm, Sunday 1 to 6pm. Upcoming exhibits include *Square Construction*, featuring Louise Weinberg and Cheryl Jasse, June 7-27; a photography show featuring Gary Duehr, June 28-July 25; and a printmaking show, July 26-August 22.



# The BAAK Gallery

## A Breath of Fresh Air

BY MARTHA ROUNDS