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Food

- Restaurants
- Recipes
- Spirits
- Shopping
- News

Arts

- Movies
- Music & Dance
- Art
- Theatre
- Books

Style

- House
- Garden
- Shopping
- The Wandering Eye

Parties & Openings

- Party Pictures
- Save the Date

Road Trips

- Excursions
- Lodgings
- Historic Homes, Museums & Gardens
- Train & Bus Schedules
- Gas Prices
- Weather

Community

- Passages
- News
- 911
- Get Involved

Kids

- Calendar

Blogs

- Dan's Diary
- Beth's Blog
- AgriCulture

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Maggie Mailer's "The Volcano Sitters" Opens at the Ferrin Gallery



"The Fact Checker," 18" x 18"

As if it were a collection of short stories, Maggie Mailer has given her new show of paintings a title—*The Volcano Sitters*—that is metaphoric. As the daughter of legendary novelist Norman Mailer, she instinctively infuses her paintings with narrative and invective, and she is happy to explain in her soft-

spoken way what the title means to her. "Volcano sitting is a state of being, when one is not looking at what's going on," she says, her clear blue eyes open wide. "I am asking the question, Why do we become numb?"

Mailer's paintings reflect the tensions within her and in the world around her. As a violent thunderstorm raged outside her studio, a reminder of the unknown consequences of climate change, she talked about the uneasy landscapes she's painted and the vague figures in them. "There's a subtle sign of impending disaster and the characters aren't aware or don't care," she says. She owns up to the irony of her

working for the past few months in a large corner storefront in downtown Pittsfield. "You have to tune things out when you work in a storefront," says Mailer, who founded the **Storefront Artist Project**. "I would look out the window and see someone pushing her entire life in a shopping cart, which is the most devastating thing." Meanwhile, she would turn her



back and return to her painting. "I always feel good when I have a brush in my hand," she says. "When I paint, it feels like a volcanic power. I am reaching for a fluidity—it's very exciting to reach that high. I always feel great when I am in the studio, and I feel shattered when I leave."

Mailer has been living and working for seven years in Pittsfield, where she moved shortly after 9/11. "I spent part of my childhood in

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Stockbridge so I felt like I was coming home," she says. She watched the attacks on the World Trade Center from her father's house in Brooklyn Heights, and *The Volcano Sitters* is in some ways her response. "It was hard for me to watch people in New York go on with their lives after that." Although the show at the Ferrin Gallery has



been planned for a year, Mailer was still painting this week. "It's only when I am near the end that I begin to really know what I am doing," she explains, pointing to some small portraits of women with

vacant gazes that she's just made on sketch paper, which she's considering adding to the show. "These ladies kind of live in the past," says Mailer, who finds that troubling. "But these little paintings are what I am most excited about right now. "Mailer strives to live and paint in the present, which can be an unsettling place. "If you are feeling joyful," she says with a sweet but brutal matter of factness, "you are not paying attention to all that is happening in a tragic way around you. The show is about the disconnect between wanting to be happy and ignoring the world."



Maggie Mailer
The Volcano Sitters

Ferrin Gallery
437 North Street, Pittsfield

Opening: June 21, 4 - 6 PM
Artist Talk: June 25, 7 PM

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