

PRESS RELEASE
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PRESS RELEASE – for additional information and images, please contact Paula Martiesian at 401-521-7634 or at artsong5354@gmail.com. Attached image: Shari Weschler in her studio and an acrylic/mixed media painting by Weschler entitled *Me and Her*.

BankRI Turks HeadGallery: “Sumo Bunni: Paintings by Shari Weschler,” July 6 through September 6, 2023. The branch is located at One Turks Head Place in downtown Providence. Hours are Monday through Thursday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The branch is closed on weekends. There will be Gallery Night Providence receptions on two evenings, July 20 and August 17 from 4 to 6:30 pm. For more information, contact www.bankri.com or call the branch at 401 456-5152.



MEET THE ARTIST – SHARI WESCHLER aka Sumo Bunni

What exactly is a Sumo Bunni? An alter ego, mirror image character dreamed up by the ever creative mind of Providence artist Shari Weschler or an actual rabbit puppet Weschler used to help transition her then young son to sleep at night? The answer, of course, is both.

When Weschler’s son was young, he struggled to quiet himself at bedtime and she turned to a rabbit puppet to engage and calm him. The puppet took on different personalities.

Sometimes funny, often cynical, but never judgmental, the puppet helped the child navigate his fears. Weschler began to think of the puppet as both strong and kind, a magical creature that helped children and adults face adversity and learn how to grow. Sumo Bunni was born.

Soon the bunny began to appear in Weschler's artwork. Narrative in nature, Weschler's paintings and drawings are atmospheric takes on the emotional aspects of being human. That she often uses the bunny to portray the human condition makes even the most painful scenes more bearable. And Weschler does not shy away from pain – or from joy.

Educated at the Maryland Institute College of Art with a degree in painting, Weschler is an artist who has successfully juggled a career as a painter, a teacher, curator and gallery owner, all while raising two children.

For several years she envisioned, directed and co-owned Coastal Contemporary Gallery in Newport. She successfully navigated the business before and through the pandemic years, keeping the doors open with an array of exhibitions featuring a wide variety of artists. She herself spent a significant amount of time in the studio grappling with the effects of lockdown and isolation, producing a body of work that is a raw and honest look at how human beings react when they can no longer come together or depend on each other. Some of the work from that time period is on display at the BankRI Galleries.

Weschler describes her pandemic studio time on her website, “An hour or two spent in a sunlit studio bathed in music, where brushes freely plunged into wild color, allowed strange new emotions to mesh and mold ingredient into haunting or waggish figures.” And the figures do haunt. Each possesses an aura of emotion that permeates the canvas. Rabbits, lions, and humans are stripped to their most naked selves. These are the figures Weschler paints.

The past two years have been difficult for Weschler, fraught with obstacles and change. Navigating a divorce, selling her longtime home and closing the gallery, she found herself living in Providence in a space without a studio and her paintings in storage. It was, understandably, a low point.

Still Weschler is nothing if not a survivor. Sculptor Elizabeth Lind offered her shared studio space at the Mill at Shady Lea studios in North Kingstown. Weschler has a new job as an executive assistant to a corporate coach. She is beginning to exhibit again and regularly posts new work on Instagram. Sumo Bunni has a few new muscles from all the heavy lifting, but she is back and painting.

The BankRI Galleries are curated by Paula Martiesian, a Providence-based artist and arts advocate.

