

coverstory

Hurricane exhibit pretty far from disaster

But storm season ends next week at Alliance for the Arts

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Shards of glass spray an angry sky.

The sun rises after a hurricane and reveals an untouched beach.

A street sign points toward the evacuation route, but — uh-oh — that's the same direction as the storm.

Three different artists, three different views of hurricane season.

In many people's minds, hurricanes represent nature's power to dismantle both lives and buildings. But a new Alliance for the Arts exhibit focuses an artist's eye on nature's fury.

This isn't a path of destruction.

It's a path of creation.

"I think the artists really jumped on this idea," says Krista Johnson, who coordinated the hurricane-themed exhibit for the Fort Myers arts center. "They took it in some wonderful directions."

Few subjects are as emotional as hurricanes, after all. That's especially true in Southwest Florida, where memories are still fresh from Hurricane Charley five years ago.

Forty-eight pieces by 48 Alliance members show storms from many different vantage points — just in time for hurricane season, too. The exhibit is called "Cone of Possibilities,"



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• Top: "After the Math," by Christina Von Jarmolinski • Bottom left: "Landfall" by Joshua Myers • Bottom middle: "Katrina - Destruction and Rebuilding," by Scott Guelcher • Bottom right: "In the Cone" by Krista Johnson

ties," a play on the infamous three-day and five-day hurricane-tracking cone.

"It just seemed like a fun thing to do," says Pat Collins, who came up with the exhibit idea as part of the Alliance's exhibition committee. "It's more fun than running

out to get supplies."

Even more fun: Seeing how artists responded.

Cape Coral artist Christa von Jarmolinski, for example, painted a near-abstract boat braving a storm-tossed sea. But she framed that downbeat image with hopeful trappings: on the

left, an aluminum storm shutter she borrowed from her house; on the right, a work glove and an empty water bottle.

The storm shutter represents security and hope, von Jarmolinski explains. "It's something to hold onto. The boat looks like it's sinking, but it's not."

Artist Carmine Ballarino of Fort Myers took a more tongue-in-cheek approach. His painting "A Sign of Trouble" shows a hurricane evacuation sign sliced into rectangular segments, as if the wind is blowing it apart.

"I like the jaggedness of it," Ballarino says. "It's

IF YOU GO

What: "Cone of Possibilities," a hurricane-themed art exhibit

When: Now through Aug. 29. Gallery hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. to noon Saturday.

Where: The Alliance for the Arts, 10091 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers

Cost: Free
Info: Call 939-2787 or go to artinlee.org

kind of jarring. It kind of portends pending disaster."

But that image gets tempered by dark humor: the sign's arrow points toward the left, and that's *exactly* where all the wind-blown tree branches are coming from.

That humor, along with a lighter color palette, keeps the painting from being too depressing, Ballarino says.

"I lightened it up on purpose," he says. "It was too gloomy."

In Southwest Florida, hurricanes are always on people's minds this time of year, especially now in the height of the season's activity. So an art exhibit seemed a natural thing, says Collins of the Alliance.

Frankly, she's surprised no one thought of it before now.

Hurricanes are inherently dramatic subject matter. There's life and death, violence and calm, destruction and creation.

Art helps people exorcise their hurricane demon — either by creating the art or viewing it later, says Johnson.

"You can handle things better," she says. "You can see everything in a different light."

That explains the enthusiasm from the artists who submitted work for the show.

"People wanted to get this off their chest," she says. "They wanted to release the memory."

While the show ends Aug. 29, the real hurricane season isn't over until Nov. 30.