



SERVING THE VISUAL ARTS SINCE 1973





BY MARY GOW * PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK ROWELL
UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE

AVA CELEBRATES 50 YEARS

CONTINUING TO SUPPORT AND NURTURE
THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

Swirls of green and blue on a little boy's painting are still drying as he puts on his coat, his mom fanning the paper as they get ready to head home from a morning visit to the free open children's studio at the AVA Gallery and Art Center in Lebanon. Across the hall in AVA's Bank Street Gallery, a volunteer wearing an exquisite painted silk scarf by an AVA artist member points out a new selection of multimedia pieces bursting with spring colors. Next door in the Bente Torjusen West Sculptural Studies Building, a woodworking instructor completes precise cuts for a dovetail joint.

“Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time.”

—Thomas Merton



Photo by Nicholas Gaffney

Shari Boraz, AVA's executive director.

At the very same time, a life drawing class works with a live model, artwork is laid out in four galleries for the upcoming annual high school show, Kelley Hersey's compelling photographs of glass and water are exhibited in the Linda Roesch Gallery, and artists quietly create in private studios throughout the building. At any moment in a typical day at AVA Gallery and Art Center, people of diverse ages and artistic backgrounds are there—making art, viewing art, and discussing art.

This year, AVA celebrates its 50-year anniversary. With this landmark anniversary, this vibrant Upper Valley cultural resource commemorates its past, enriches the present, and looks ahead to a dynamic sustainable future. With the anniversary, AVA has multiple festive events—celebrating with people already involved with AVA and welcoming more to join in.

“Art is essential and remains essential to our daily lives. It is vital that we encourage and nurture creativity through art education and artistic opportunities for all people,” says Shari Boraz, AVA's executive director. “AVA provides individuals with opportunities to learn new skills and create meaningful connections,” she says, noting that community connections and involvement with art are critical today and in the future, especially in the face of technologies that give rise to isolation.





Above: The Linda Roesch Visual Arts Gallery.

Bottom, from far left: AVA Annual Silent Auction. The Winkey Kelsey Stone Carving Studio in the Sculptural Studies Building. An Open Studio Life Drawing session. Last two photos courtesy of AVA.



Above from left:

AVA shared a space with Harris Business Machines in Hanover, circa 1974. H.W. Carter & Sons Building, circa 1970. The Community Gallery of 1973 was a barn in Norwich. An exhibit during the 1970s when AVA shared space with Harris Business Machines. Historic photos courtesy of AVA



AVA'S PAST

AVA's impressive cultural role in the community has grown through the decades. Initially launched as the Community Gallery in 1973, a small group of accomplished Upper Valley artists set up summer exhibitions in a friend's Norwich barn. The group gelled, and in 1974 rented shared space in downtown Hanover, soon incorporating as a nonprofit organization. Renamed Alliance for the Visual Arts, AVA Gallery and Art Center began offering art classes. AVA remained in downtown Hanover for 16 years, but when the Dartmouth Bookstore expanded, requiring its space, the arts organization needed a new home.

AVA TIMELINE

August 24, 1973 – A small group of Upper Valley artists organized their first exhibition. Called the Community Gallery, it was held in a barn in Norwich.

1974 – With 35 member artists, the Community Gallery relocated to downtown Hanover, sharing space with Harris Business Machines.

1976 – The Community Gallery incorporated as a nonprofit.

1978 – Renamed Alliance for the Visual Arts, AVA Gallery and Art Center began offering art classes.

1986 – Bente Torjusen West became AVA's executive director, a position she held through 2016.

1988 – Education program expanded to include artists and audiences of all ages.

1990 – Relocated to 11 Bank Street in Lebanon, renting the first and





The transition in 1990 from Hanover to the vast 19th century industrial building in Lebanon, longtime home of the former H.W. Carter & Sons Overall Company, was a giant leap. "I felt that it was a good location for AVA to reach out more to the surrounding communities," said Bente Torjusen West, AVA's executive director from 1986 to 2016, who advocated the move.

The relocation provided massively more space. High ceilinged rooms that had buzzed with sewing machines and cutting tables became dedicated classroom studios and airy galleries for exhibitions. In Lebanon, AVA expanded to a broader role, offering more classes and partnering with community organizations to

serve local needs including art for preschoolers and for people with disabilities.

AVA bought the building in 2003, subsequently renovating it to contemporary building codes and energy-efficient design. In 2014, AVA embarked on another successful development campaign, this time adding a state-of-the-art, 4,000-square-foot Sculptural Studies Building.

AVA TODAY: EXHIBITIONS

AVA's current programming focuses on three main categories: exhibitions, art classes, and community programs. Today, as in those first shows in Norwich, AVA presents dynamic exhibitions of contemporary artwork by artists

AVA BY THE NUMBERS

- 6 – Free community programs
- 10 – Years of AVA's quarterly storytelling series, The Mudroom
- 19 – Private artist studios
- 50 – Years of art (so far)
- 47 + 11 – Art education artist instructors + 11 camp assistants
- 70 – Members Gallery volunteers who donated a total of over 3,500 hours
- 198 – Art education classes
- 255 – Artist Members
- 600 – Artists shown
- 5,323 – Exhibition attendees

From AVA's fiscal year 2023

second floors of the historic building, long home to the former H.W. Carter & Sons overall factory, which closed in 1985.

2003 – Purchased 11 Bank Street building, first capital campaign.

2006 – Building renovated and renamed the Carter-Kelsey Building. Began offering affordable artist studio rentals.

2014 – Capital campaign launched for 4,000-square-foot

sculptural studies building with studios for welding, woodworking, ceramics, and stone carving.

2017 – Bente Torjusen West Sculptural Studies Building dedicated.

2021 – AVA opened the Bank Street Gallery at AVA, a dedicated space for artist members to show and sell their work.

2023-2024 – AVA celebrates 50 years of supporting and nurturing the creative spirit through its exhibition, community, and art educational programming in the Upper Valley.



of our region. AVA has five distinct exhibition galleries. Through the year, eight to ten curated solo and group exhibitions are presented in each gallery. A sampling of upcoming exhibitions shows their diversity: hand-forged steel by Justin O'Rourke; a group show featuring innovative processes in photography; *Mapping Memories*, with paintings and sculptural paintings by Peter Anderson and Caleb Brown; collage and monoprints by Erika Lawlor Schmidt; and works in fiber by Janie Cohen.

The Bank Street Gallery at AVA, the sixth main floor gallery, sells fine art and craft by AVA Artist Members. With cards, ornaments, jewelry, ceramics, textile art, paintings, and stained glass, this retail gallery is very popular for gift and special occasion shopping. Artists with studios in the building—19 studios in all—also show their work in second- and third-floor hallways.

EDUCATION

AVA's classes range from beginners' courses for all ages to specialized sessions for professional artists. Courses are taught by accomplished artists and art educators. Basic drawing, portraiture, capturing qualities of light in watercolor, 3D printing, metalsmithing, hand and wheel ceramics, and introduction to woodworking are among them.

A mind-boggling variety of children's classes are taught in after-school and weekend sessions, vacation programs, and summer art camps. The Art of Play, Comics and Zines, 3D Printing, and Ink and Paper Magic are among options for 6- to 13-year-olds.

The Bente Torjusen West Sculptural Studies Building, dedicated in 2017, is outfitted with specialized tools for woodworking, ceramics, stone sculpture, and metalworking. Classes introduce newcomers to these three-dimensional media and facilitate development of skills for more advanced students.

COMMUNITY

Among AVA's spectacular achievements are its free art programs serving the community. With partnerships with area organizations and the generosity of donors, AVA provides six ongoing free programs bringing people together with



Top left: Longtime AVA supporters Stephen Plume, Betsy Banks, and Greg Banks.
Second row: Jewelry Designer Pauling Werger holding an AVA 50th Anniversary cake. Clifford B. West Gallery. Photos by Travis Paige courtesy of AVA.
Third row: The Bank Street Gallery.
Bottom row: Annual High School Exhibition. Creating ceramics at AVA. Photo by Travis Paige courtesy of AVA.



others and with art. Two mornings each week, in CAOS (Community Arts Open Studio), children and their caregivers make self-directed projects with art supplies provided by AVA. In weekly Senior Art sessions, the formerly middle-aged explore artistic expression. Art Lab, in collaboration with the Special Needs Support Center, serves adults with cognitive or other disabilities. Fiber Arts Open Studio, ArtStop for after-school artmaking for middle schoolers, and ArtReach with online live artists are also on the weekly schedule.

AVA'S FUTURE

Looking ahead, AVA is building on its successes and opening new opportunities to inspire, nurture, and showcase the artistic spirit. AVA's staff and faculty continue developing programs to address community needs, including expanding remote accessibility, as with AVA's ArtReach, online artist talks, and live-streamed sessions of the quarterly Mud Room storytelling series. In addition to the existing strong curriculum, AVA has an eye to more upcoming classes dealing with new technologies in art.

Making sure that art experiences are available to more people is an AVA priority. Says Shari Boraz, "The Upper Valley community includes people of all ages, people visiting the area, even people who may only briefly be here, perhaps needing a bit of respite while dealing with medical care at the hospital. One of my goals is to make the joy of viewing art, as well as making art, available to as many people as possible. There is great pleasure when a person is looking at something new and it provokes wonder. Often your brain is positively activated when you are in the presence of art."

Embarking on its next half century, AVA has a new tagline: "Where creativity is celebrated and community thrives." The doors are open, and AVA welcomes old friends and new to come celebrate. 🌸

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