

LONG RIVER GALLERY



ART ON MAIN STREET



BY SUSAN B. APEL ✨ PHOTOGRAPHY BY LARS BLACKMORE

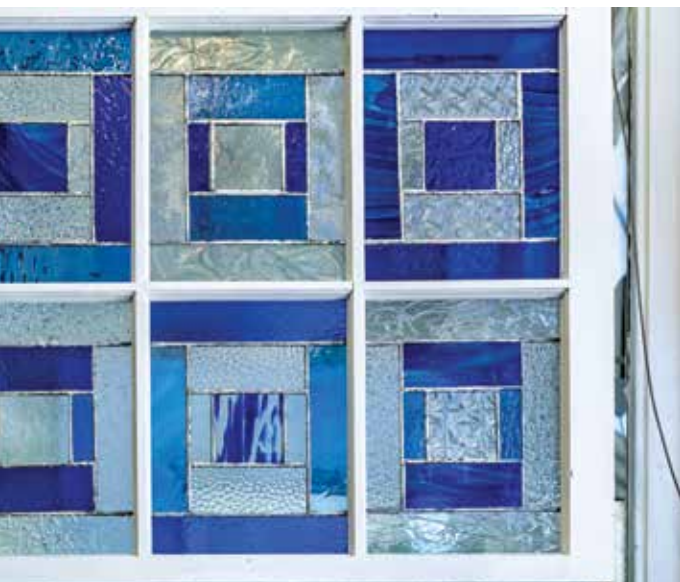
Rachel Obbard and Kathy Detzer are the slightly improbable co-owners of Long River Gallery in White River Junction, Vermont. Rachel has an engineering background and has taught at the Thayer School at Dartmouth College; she is currently a senior lecturer and assistant adjunct professor at Dartmouth's Institute of Writing and Rhetoric. Kathy has a degree in graphic design and has been a painter "forever," working mostly in pastels. They've known each other since their children, now grown, were in the second grade at the Dothan Brook School. In 2018, Rachel wandered into the gallery during a First Friday event in downtown White River, where her husband was playing in a band called Meadowlark. She learned the business was for sale and leapt at the opportunity.

The two women find joy in running the gallery and acknowledge that their talents and contributions to the enterprise are complementary. "Extrovert," says Kathy pointing at herself, and "introvert," this time pointing at her partner. "I do the QuickBooks," adds Rachel; Kathy loves being on the gallery floor. Kathy has an eye for the display, knowing what works might complement each other on a gallery wall. Rachel can be seen balancing on the ladder, taking on the physical task of hanging the paintings.

A NEW HOME

The two have been co-owners since 2020. They are relatively recent players in the gallery's history. Long River Gallery was founded by Maggie Busheri, Allie Farr, and Peg Little as an artists' cooperative in Lyme, New Hampshire, where it remained for over 20 years. In 2013, Dave Celone, then of Lyme, took over the business. Three years later, Dave moved the gallery into the former White River Yarns space in downtown White River Junction, stating, "I thought it would bring visibility to the expanding number of artists. Lyme was a slow location





Top row from left: Owners Kathy Detzer and Rachel Obbard. Photo courtesy of Long River Gallery. A view of the gallery floor from the main entry.

Bottom row from left: Stemmed glassware and paperweights by Alex Kalish and cordial glasses by Janet Zug. Stained glass piece by Kathleen Curwen and framed images by illustrator Zoe Tilley-Poster. Amanda Ann Palmer's pottery on display in the gallery window.



Clockwise from top left:
 Oil paintings by painter Betsy Derrick. Collages of cut paper by Anne Santa Maria. A unique selection of felted art, cards, games, and books. Jewelry display of various artists. An assortment of woodenware from Rockledge Farms.



from a customer traffic standpoint, and it was set a long way back from the road.”

In Lyme, the gallery was solitary. The move to White River Junction meant Long River would swim in artsy waters, alongside art bigwigs like the College for Cartoon Studies and Northern Stage, as well as offbeat commercial establishments like clothing stores Revolution and Oodles, Lampscares, Scavenger Jewelry, and eventually newer art galleries like Kishka. Lyme was more bucolic, serene. Downtown White River thrums with more activity and foot traffic, particularly as it became one of the Upper Valley’s restaurant—as well as art—hubs.

Rachel and Kathy both speak of how supportive the local business and arts community has been, noting that their gallery has joined the newly formed Downtown Business Association that meets at the Coolidge Hotel on the first Monday of each month to discuss common concerns and search for ways to support the town’s arts and small business economy and each other. As a side note, the majority of arts and other businesses in White River seem to be—like Long River Gallery—woman-owned.

SERVING UPPER VALLEY ARTISTS AND PATRONS

Long River Gallery is a place of both art and commerce. It hosts quarterly exhibitions of the works of one regional artist at a time. When possible, there are meet-the-artist receptions, often coinciding with one of White River Junction’s First Friday celebrations, a self-guided walk through the downtown area with open houses, live music, and maybe some wine and hors d’oeuvres. First Fridays are popular and energetic, drawing approximately 60 patrons or more into the gallery in an evening. In addition, the gallery’s compact space displays for sale the works of approximately 80 local artists and craftspeople: fine art paintings, functional pottery, fabric art, and wearables like scarves and mittens. The art tends toward the representational and nature scenes; the crafts are well-curated.

How are artists selected? The gallery has what it refers to as a few “legacy artists,” who

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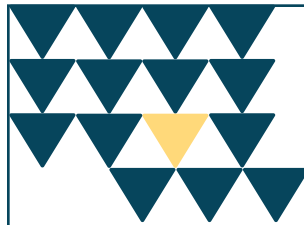
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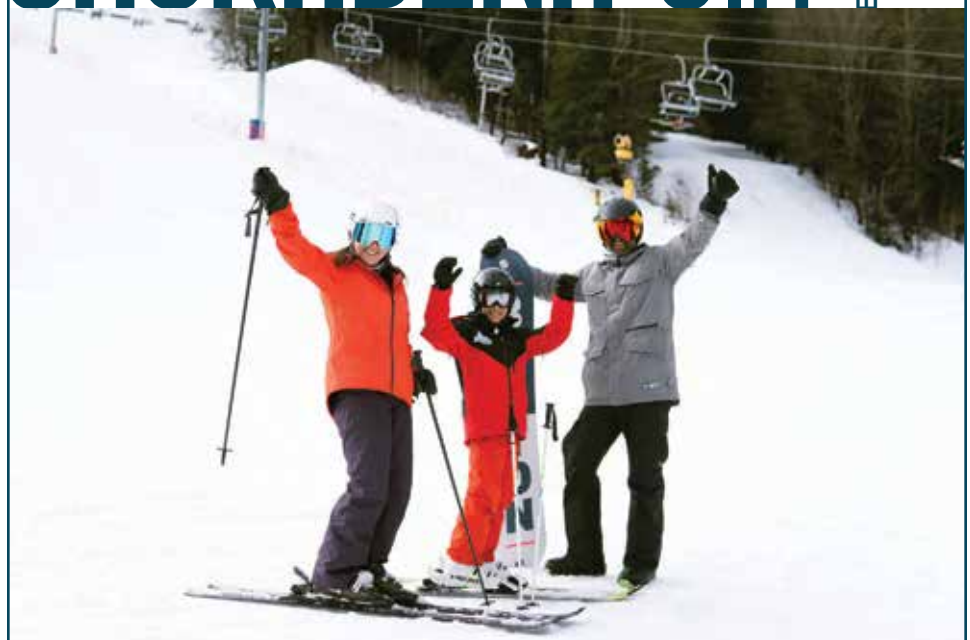
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have had work more or less continuously at the gallery since its inception, decades ago, in Lyme. For others, there is a twice yearly (January and June) submission process. In addition to quality, Rachel and Kathy judge the submissions according to whether the work is a “good fit” for sale in their gallery. Occasionally they have discovered artists whose work may not fit for the purpose of retail but is compelling enough to be considered for one of their exhibitions.

Staging exhibitions and selling art and crafts are the central but not the only activities at the gallery. In addition to the First Friday celebrations, Long River participates in the Vermont Crafts Council’s Open Studios, an annual open house event in which creatives demonstrate their processes in their working studios. The gallery’s business model includes “shop sitters,” also known as “artistes de galerie,” who are represented artists and crafters who take turns minding the store. In between ringing up sales, they can be found working on and answering questions about their art—painting, making jewelry, needle felting.

Like many small businesses, the holiday season is particularly busy and accounts for much of the retail sales at the gallery. Shelves are kept well-stocked with seasonal work that is popular for gift giving. Then January is a time to take a breather, deep clean the store after all the holiday traffic, and plan for the upcoming year.

Both owners love that their workplace is filled with art, and they often have to fight the urge to buy it and take it home. Apart from the aesthetics, they feel a sense of history about the gallery and are honored to have a place in it. Rachel searched for the right word to describe their roles and landed on “stewards,” adding, “We are the current owners. Long before us, and long after us, we see Long River Gallery as being in service to artists in the Upper Valley.” 🌸

Long River Gallery

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longrivergallery.com