

VERMONT

m a g a z i n e



\$6.99US \$7.99CAN 28>



7 25274 76740 3

HOLIDAY 2025 / WINTER 2026

LARGER THAN LIFE



How the Brattleboro Festival of Miniatures unites an entire community through art and imagination.

This winter, the town of Brattleboro will glow with creative warmth. From Thanksgiving weekend through New Year's Day, Main Street will transform into a living gallery—a constellation of illuminated windows shimmering with imagination and charm. Inside each storefront, visitors will discover a world in miniature that is larger than life: snow-flecked villages, hand-blown glass ornaments, model trains circling tiny landscapes, and intricate dollhouses.

The Brattleboro Festival of Miniatures, presented by the Downtown Brattleboro Alliance with festival creator Melany Kahn, will be a town-wide celebration of artistry, nostalgia, and community. It's part holiday stroll, part fine art exhibition, and part storybook in motion. More than sixty participating businesses will unveil window displays that showcase the region's creative heart, including miniature gardens and gingerbread houses, fairy-tale dioramas, and hand-crafted scenes inspired by the town's people, history, and cultural legacy. At the heart of it all stands one show-stopping centerpiece—a four-foot-tall restored Victorian dollhouse, lovingly nicknamed the "Painted Lady" and painstakingly brought back to life by Melany Kahn. Displayed in the window of Mitchell Giddings Fine Arts, this luminous miniature home will contain the original work of more than 100 local artisans. Highlights include hand-thrown pottery, carved wooden furniture, woven rugs, stitched quilts, and delicate, hand-blown glass. Every room tells a story, every object a collaboration. "Each piece that comes in feels like a gift," says Kahn. "It's a glimpse into someone's imagination. When you see them all together, it becomes something so much larger than any one person's vision."

The festival will be anchored by a full calendar of community events, creating a month-long celebration of artistry and holiday spirit. Beginning December 5–7, the Gallery Walk and Holiday Tree Lighting will coincide with a Gingerbread Barn Contest and Miniature Cookie Contest at Retreat Farm. The following weekend, December 12–14, the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center will host a Model Train Display and Mad Hatter Miniature Tea Party, while Sandglass Theater performs "Fritzi's Flea Circus" and their beloved Shadow Nativity Play. The final weekend, December



Top: Fascinating miniaturized furnishings from a miniature installation. **Middle:** Small and functional touches bring each miniature project to life. **Bottom:** The proud members of "Dollhouse Clubhouse," (Left to Right) Amelia Farnum, Melany Kahn, and Desiree Stango, as well as the Festival's Executive Producer, Nancy Vitale (Far Right)

LARGER THAN LIFE

19–21, brings the debut of Spirit Houses, an imaginative exhibition of identical dollhouses re-envisioned by twelve area schools, each transformed through the creativity of local students and teachers.

The Downtown Brattleboro Alliance, led by Kate Trzaskos and Erin Scaggs, will host the festival alongside Kahn, whose creative leadership has woven together merchants, artisans, schools, and nonprofits into one harmonious community effort. “Brattleboro is known for its art and individuality,” says Trzaskos. “This festival is about showing what can happen when everyone brings their creativity to the table—when the whole town becomes the canvas.” Beyond the festivity, there’s also a deeper purpose. The restored Victorian dollhouse will be auctioned at the festival’s close, with proceeds benefiting the Downtown Brattleboro Alliance. “This is an event rooted in generosity,” Kahn adds. “It’s about people creating together, celebrating together, and supporting the place we call home.”

An Enchanted Season in Miniature

As the Holiday season takes shape on Main Street, Brattleboro will begin its transformation—storefront by storefront, window by window—into a gallery of imagination. What makes the Festival of Miniatures extraordinary is not only its massive scale, but its spirit. Every display will carry the imprint of the person or business that made it. Some are whimsical and playful; others are refined and architectural. Together, they create a portrait of a town that celebrates craft, humor, and heart in equal measure.

At Tavernier Chocolates, artisans known for their imaginative truffles will

construct a miniature chocolate factory—a world within a world—complete with tiny molds, copper kettles, and miniature trays of ganache cooling on doll-sized racks. Down the street, Morning Glorious Vintage will fill its window with a Vintage fashion doll



The glorious, impeccably-restored “Painted Lady”

tableau: mannequins styled in 1960s couture, surrounded by doll-sized versions of their own mid-century garments. “Every shopkeeper is creating their own story,” says Trzaskos. “No two windows will look alike, and that’s the beauty of it. You’re walking through Brattleboro, but also through the collective imagination of everyone who lives and works here.”

In the bright window of Mitchell Giddings Fine Arts, the centerpiece of the festival—the restored Victorian dollhouse—will command attention. More than four feet tall and lit from within, it will gleam with the light of a hundred handmade works of art in miniature. Inside, each room reveals the handiwork of Vermont’s most talented artists and craftspeople.

There are hand-thrown ceramic bowls by Natalie Blake, each no larger than a thumbprint; woven baskets so fine they seem spun from thread; and a fireplace built by Amelia Farnum. The sewing room will feature hand-stitched overalls by Sandy Klein, the costume designer for the New England Youth Theatre, while the kitchen shelves hold miniature ceramic plates by Laura Zindel and a pitcher by Christine Herbert.

Tiny paintings adorn the parlor walls—miniatures of works by artists like Andy Yoder and Brittany Bills-Coleman—and in one upstairs room, an artist’s studio holds a doll-sized easel displaying a reproduction of a painting by Kahn’s late mother, Emily Mason. It is an homage not only to her family’s artistic legacy but also to the power of art to transcend generations. “I wanted the house to be alive with creativity,” Kahn explains. “Every inch of it should feel like Brattleboro—our people, our colors, our humor, our craftsmanship.”

Each window in town will echo that sensibility in its own way. HatchSpace, Brattleboro’s community woodworking studio, will fill its display with a handmade model garage, crafted by master builder Tom Bodett. At The Shoe Tree, Amelia Farnum and Bodett’s wife, Rita Ramirez, will showcase a whimsical scene of their tiny, hand-knit animals—bunnies, bears, and mice—playing among painted shoe boxes under a tree. Every stitch and every detail has been made by hand by a group of knitters committed to tiny knitting.

For Kahn, the event is as much about process as presentation. “We want people to walk through downtown and feel the generosity behind it,” she says. “When you stop to look into a window, you’re not just seeing art—

you're seeing the collaboration of a whole community." The Brattleboro Museum & Art Center, a longtime anchor of the town's creative life, will host a model train display that will wind through the building's front hall. The Mad Hatter Miniature Tea Party, presented in partnership with the newly opened Humble Mug tea house, will serve tea in child-sized tea sets and pastries at tiny tables borrowed from local Montessori classrooms, with a train chugging around to deliver treats. The event is expected to sell out within days. "It's pure, immersive magic," says producer Nancy Vitale, who has spent months orchestrating logistics for the festival. "Every event adds another layer to the story, and each one highlights a different part of what makes Brattleboro remarkable." Over at the Latchis Theatre, a historic cinema, the staff is planning miniature movie-themed windows featuring a

doll-sized popcorn machine. At Retreat Farm, families will participate in the Gingerbread Barn Contest—a nod to their own barns and agricultural roots—while children compete in a Miniature Cookie Contest judged by Tom Bodett.

The culmination of the season will be the Spirit Houses Project, created by Mary McLoughlin in collaboration with HatchSpace and twelve local schools, from Putney Central and Dummerston to Brattleboro Union High School and Hilltop Montessori. Each school has received an identical unfinished wooden dollhouse and been invited to transform it using any materials they choose. The results—twelve entirely distinct creations—will be exhibited at the Boys & Girls Club of Brattleboro in a special showcase that runs from December 19-21st. "Each house will reflect the soul of

the school that made it," Kahn says. "It's about imagination, teamwork, and letting young people see themselves as artists and builders. It's my favorite part of the whole thing."

Throughout the month, visitors will also stumble upon surprises tucked into unexpected corners: a "Museum of Tiny and Found Things", curated by local artist Doran Hamm, will pop up at the Latchis Theatre Gallery, filled with whimsical collections of miniatures, toys, and curiosities; pop-up markets will showcase local artisans selling small works perfect for holiday gifting; and street performers, musicians, and puppeteers will fill the air with laughter and song. Even Brattleboro's restaurants will join the theme, serving specialty menus of small bites—mini pancakes, petite croissants, and sin-



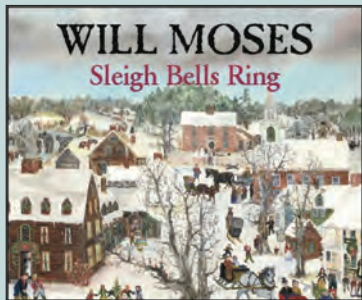
RYAN BENT PHOTOGRAPHY

Fine Homebuilding +
Construction Management

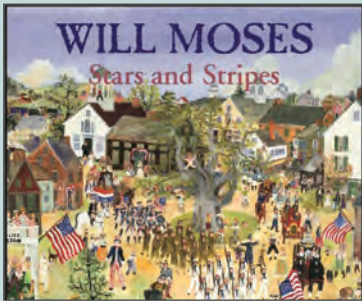
Red House Building

802.655.0009
RedHouseBuilding.com

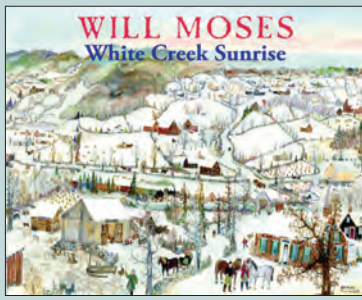
WILL MOSES



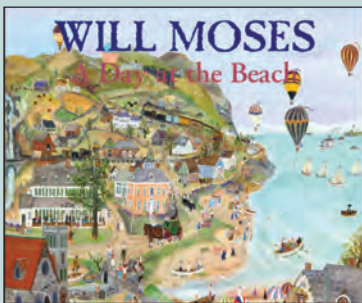
SLEIGH BELLS RING 1000 Piece Puzzle
19-1/4" X 26-5/8" \$19.95



STARS AND STRIPES 1000 Piece Puzzle
19-1/4" X 26-5/8" \$19.95



WHITE CREEK SUNRISE 1000 Piece Puzzle
19-1/4" X 26-5/8" \$19.95



A DAY AT THE BEACH 1000 Piece Puzzle
19-1/4" X 26-5/8" \$19.95

"Art to warm your heart and home"

MT. NEBO GALLERY

60 Grandma Moses Rd.

P.O. Box 94, Eagle Bridge, NY 12057

1-800-328-6326

FREE color catalog is available featuring
Will Moses limited edition Folk Art Prints,
Books, Puzzles, Cards & More!

VISA MASTERCARD AMERICAN EXPRESS

PROMPT DELIVERY SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

Visit us on the web at www.willmoses.com

or visit the Will Moses Dealer near you.

Bennington Museum, Bennington, VT

Bear Pond Books, Stowe, VT

Vermont Artisan Designs, Brattleboro, VT

F.H. Gillingham & Sons, Woodstock, VT

Sweet Cecily, Middlebury, VT

LARGER THAN LIFE

gle-sip hot chocolates.

It's a festival designed to delight all five senses. The twinkle of holiday lights will reflect off glass ornaments and icicles, the smell of cinnamon and cocoa will drift from café doors, and the sound of cheerful mingling and model trains will mingle with music in the crisp winter air.

The Making of a Movement

A year ago, the miniature restoration group now known as "Dollhouse Clubhouse" was little more than a creative gathering that was held on a weekly basis in Melany Kahn's farmhouse studio in West Brattleboro. There, Kahn and her friends, including Amelia Farnum and Desiree Stango, would spend hours repairing and decorating old dollhouses. They wallpapered, refurbished, decorated, and painted them with the same care a builder would give to a real home.

The idea was inspired in part by the model-train hobbyists in town — a group of Dads who called themselves "Train Club" and met weekly at HatchSpace to build elaborate miniature railroads. "I saw how much joy they got from making things together," Kahn recalls. "And I thought, why shouldn't we have something like that? We wanted a space to create, laugh, and reconnect with the tactile world — so Dollhouse Clubhouse was born."

The group began modestly, with a few small restoration projects. But soon, they stumbled upon a discovery that would change everything. A friend sent Kahn a photo of a battered Victorian dollhouse listed for sale on Facebook Marketplace. Kahn wasn't even on Facebook — "It had to find me,"

she laughs — but she was instantly drawn to its copper roof and ornate trim. "It was falling apart," she says, "but it had good bones. I thought, this house deserves another life."

The house became the centerpiece of their efforts. With help from her friends, Kahn stripped, repainted, rewired, and restored it to its former glory, painting it in rich shades with embossed paper ceilings and carefully grouted tile floors. "We took it right down to the studs," says Desiree Stango, who worked alongside her at the farmhouse. "We treated it the same way you'd treat a real renovation project—structural fixes first, then design."

For Kahn, every detail became an opportunity to connect local artistry to her lifelong fascination with small worlds. "Miniatures are more than decoration," she explains. "They're a reflection of memory, imagination, and care. They remind us of continuity—of things passed down through generations. That's one reason people respond to them so deeply."

As the restored dollhouse took shape, it began attracting visitors. Friends stopped by the farmhouse to admire the work, to drop off bits of fabric or old miniatures from their attics. Soon, Kahn's farm became a creative hub, overflowing with people, stories, and tiny works of art. "It was contagious," she says. "One person would bring a friend, who'd bring another friend, and before long we had a whole community working together."

The transformation from hobby to movement happened almost accidentally. While discussing where to display the finished dollhouse, Kahn floated the idea of placing it in a downtown window — perhaps at HatchSpace or Mitchell Giddings Fine Arts. But as word spread, so did the enthusiasm. "Someone said,

“Wouldn’t it be amazing if every store had a window like that?” Kahn recalls. “And that was the spark. Suddenly, it wasn’t just a dollhouse—it was a town-wide dream.”

To bring the idea to life, Kahn reached out to the renowned Downtown Brattleboro Alliance, the nonprofit behind many of the town’s signature cultural events. She met with Executive Director Kate Trzaskos and Creative Director Erin Scaggs. “At first, there was a little skepticism,” said Trzaskos. “It was such a big idea — transforming downtown into a miniature window stroll inspired by Fifth Avenue, but with a Brattleboro soul. But Melany’s enthusiasm was absolutely contagious. Before long, everyone was imagining the possibilities.”

Together, they began sketching out the festival’s framework: a town-wide win-

dow stroll, events, competitions, partnerships with schools, and a grand prize for the most creative window displays. “We wanted to capture the magic of those old department-store windows,” Kahn says, “but in a way that reflected who we are as a community.”

To rally participants, Kahn co-hosted a “Sip & Chat” at the Downtown Alliance office in June 2025—a networking event she completely transformed into a festive, food-filled celebration. “It was wonderful to see merchants get excited about using their creativity in a new way,” said Trzaskos. “Watching them dream up scenes and share materials and sketches reminded me why Brattleboro is such a creative hub.” By the end of that afternoon, everyone was on board—or as they like to say now, “fully aboard the mini train.”

By the end of the summer, 60 storefronts signed on to create displays, each offering its own spin on the miniature theme. To encourage participation, Kahn and the Alliance created a tiered stipend system. “We wanted it to feel accessible,” she explains. “We weren’t asking people to spend money—they were already decorating for the holidays. We just asked them to lean into the theme.”

A friendly competition soon emerged, complete with cash prizes and plans for celebrity judges to award categories such as Grand Champion, Champion, Reserve Champion, and People’s Choice. The ribbons themselves—large, ornate rosettes modeled after those from the Chelsea Flower Show—will mark each winning window. “It’s all in good fun,” Kahn says, “but the rivalry’s real. Everyone wants that big ribbon.”



2022 PHOTO CONTEST WINNER EMIR HOROZOVIC (COURTESY OLD MILL ROAD MEDIA)



VERMONT Magazine's 2026 PHOTO CONTEST!

We are accepting submissions
NOW through April 1, 2026.

CONTEST RULES:

Winning images will be published in
the Summer/Fall issue of *VERMONT Magazine*.

- Photos MUST be taken in Vermont.
- Please submit a maximum of ten (10) photographs.
- Submissions will be reviewed by a panel of judges.

PHOTO LABELING:

Please label the file name as your name
along with the title of your picture.

example: jdoe.shotofvermont.jpeg

Attach entry photos to your submission email.

If you plan to submit more than one photograph,
number each photograph in the title.

example: jdoe.2.shotofvermont.jpeg

SUBMIT YOUR PHOTOS HERE:

vtmag.com/post/2026-photo-contest



Advertise Today!



Media

kim@oldmillroadmedia.com

802-891-4771

oldmillroadmedia.com

LARGER THAN LIFE

The festival's Executive Producer, Nancy Vitale, likens the project to directing a film. "There are dozens of moving parts," she says. "Artists, shop owners, schools, sponsors, volunteers—it's like a living set." But she credits Kahn's charisma and vision for keeping everyone inspired. "Melany has this incredible energy," adds Vitale. "She's part producer, part artist, part ringmaster. She's brought out the best in everyone involved."

As the festival neared launch, the farmhouse that once hosted Dollhouse Clubhouse began to resemble a creative workshop on overdrive. On any given day, Kahn could be found unpacking new submissions from local artists—ceramics, stained glass, knitted animals—while volunteers in-

stalled lighting or adjusted wallpaper inside the restored Victorian. "Every time a new piece arrives, it feels like Christmas morning," says Kahn. "I never know what I'm going to find when I unwrap the next box."

A Legacy in Color: The Kahn-Mason-Trumbull Lineage

To understand the wellspring of creativity that runs through Melany Kahn's life, one must first look to her lineage—an extraordinary family whose work shaped the course of American art. Her father, Wolf Kahn (1927–2020), was one of the most celebrated landscape painters of his generation. Born in Stuttgart, Germany, he fled Nazi Europe as a child, finding refuge and, eventually, his calling in the United States. After serving in the

Navy and studying under the famed painter Hans Hofmann, Kahn became known for his singular ability to fuse color-field abstraction with luminous realism. His canvases—fields of lilac fog, amber trees, and violet-shadowed barns—captured the light of the world as if it emanated from within.

Kahn's mastery earned him exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney, and the Museum of Modern Art, but it was in Vermont that his vision found its deepest resonance. For more than half a century, he painted from the family's West Brattleboro farm, the same place where Melany now works. The meadows, sugar maples, and distant hills of Windham County became his lifelong muse, their ever-shifting hues reflected in his pastels and oils. "He painted the same view over and over," says



NORTHSHIRE NETWORKS

YOUR LINK TO THE WORLD

Commercial & Residential
Hospitality • Municipality • Banking & Healthcare
Residence • School Campus



Managed IT Services

- Strategic IT Planning
- Server/Workstation Sales, Setup & Maintenance
- Microsoft 365 / Microsoft Azure

Networks

- Wi-Fi Specialists
- Routing, Switching & VPNs
- Point-To-Point & Point-To-Multi-Point Wireless
- Cabling & Fiber Optics

Security Services

- 24/7 Endpoint Security Monitoring
- Advanced Cybersecurity Endpoint Detection & Response
- Onsite & Offsite Data Backup

Audio/Visual

- Commercial Audio
- LCD TV's & Mounting
- Sonos Sales & Installation
- Digital Signage

northshirenetworks.com

802-255-9989

sales@northshirenetworks.com





CASELLA

Offering waste and recycling collection and so much more!

We all play an important role in advancing sustainability for the world around us. The work we do, the infrastructure we build, and the investments we make help to enable our customers and communities to achieve their recycling goals.

Scan the QR code to learn more about our services & sustainability initiatives:



RESIDENTIAL CURBSIDE SERVICE



DUMPSTER RENTAL

Our team is here for you: **800-CASELLA • casella.com**



RECYCLING • SOLUTIONS • ORGANICS • COLLECTION • ENERGY • LANDFILLS

DR MARY CLEARY LEWIS PSYCHOANALYST



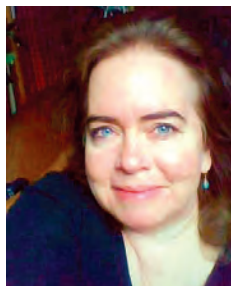
SPECIALIZING IN THE EFFECTS OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ON FAMILY, SPOUSAL, AND OTHER SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS.

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

*CERTIFICATE IN
ADVANCED GRADUATE STUDIES IN
PSYCHOANALYTIC PSYCHOTHERAPY*

*FACULTY, MASSACHUSETTS
INSTITUTE FOR PSYCHOANALYSIS*

IN-OFFICE OR REMOTE
DRMARYCLEARYLEWIS@GMAIL.COM
(802) 236-3389



www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/dr-mary-cleary-lewis-brattleboro-vt/146058

LARGER THAN LIFE

Melany Kahn, “because he understood that light—and life—are never the same twice.”

Melany’s mother, Emily Mason (1932–2019), was equally devoted to the language of color, though she spoke it in a different dialect. A lyrical abstractionist whose work balanced spontaneity with precision, Mason was born in New York City and trained at Bennington College and Cooper Union. She studied painting in Venice on a Fulbright Fellowship, where she married Wolf. Their union would become one of the great creative partnerships in modern art.

Emily’s paintings are radiant studies in transparency and emotion, layered washes of color that seem to hover between motion and stillness. For more than three decades, she taught painting at Hunter College in New York, inspiring generations of young artists. Walking through her studio on the farm, one can still feel her presence in the air—the scent of linseed oil, the jars of pigment on the shelves, the faint echo of brushes against canvas. “It’s like she never left,” Melany says. “Her energy is still here, in every color.”

And then there is Alice Trumbull Mason (1904–1971), Melany’s grandmother and a pioneering figure in American abstraction. A descendant of the Revolutionary-era painter John Trumbull, Alice was among the first women to dedicate her career to non-objective art in a time when abstraction was often dismissed or misunderstood. She co-founded the American Abstract Artists group in 1936—a collective that included Arshile Gorky and Piet Mondrian—and fought tirelessly to promote abstract art as a legitimate, spiritual language.

Her 1962 painting *Magnitude of Regions* exemplifies her late style: interlocking planes of ochre and gray, balanced with mathematical precision yet alive with emotional undercurrents. The work is featured in the Southern Vermont Arts Center's well-received exhibition, *Into the Abstract* (Now through January 4, 2026). It is featured alongside pieces by the exhibition's primary artists, Neda Vedpathak and Paul Gruhler, as well as two singular pieces by Sam Gilliam and Felix Gonzalez-Torres, whose works were brought to the exhibition through a loan from the Art Bridges Foundation. The artwork of Alice Trumbull Mason was



Alice Trumbull Mason's *Magnitude of Regions*, featured in Southern Vermont Arts Center's "Into the Abstract" exhibition on loan from the Art Bridges Foundation. (Courtesy SVAC)

decades ahead of her time, and her work embodied a rare balance—both rational and emotional, intellectual and intuitive. In *Magnitude of Regions*, the viewer can feel both order and grief, as if she distilled emotion into geometry.

The inclusion of Alice Trumbull Mason's painting's in "Into the Abstract" marks a homecoming of sorts. The exhibition, supported in part by the Wolf Kahn Foundation and the Emily Mason | Alice Trumbull Mason Foundation, celebrates the lineage of abstraction across generations – and how artists from different eras, disciplines, and geographies have turned inward to find harmony in form and color.

Spread It *Grandpa's Stuff*
Maple Cream

Enjoy the Essence & Flavor
"MADE IN VERMONT"

Grandpa's Stuff is a family run business inspired by generations of family tradition. From our kitchen to yours!

Featured on Food TV & Fine Living channel's "Food Finds"!



gstuff@vermontel.net
www.grandpasstuff.com
802-287-1812



Salisbury dreaming..

Charm, character, acreage, outbuildings, and heritage. The kind of quintessential Vermont homestead your dreams are made of.

130 Smead Road, Salisbury | 3 BD | 2 BA | 2084 SF
8.00 AC | \$624,000 | MLS #5060367



34 Main Street, Middlebury
802.388.4242
info@ipjrealestate.com

ipjrealestate.com



EXPERIENCE VERMONT

Since 1954, an organization of Vermont enthusiasts whose objective is to visit all of the state's towns and cities.



Now thousands of members strong and growing.

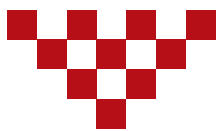
JOIN TODAY!
Sign up now online!

To Sign Up Or Give A Gift Go to

vt251.com

email: thevt251club@gmail.com

**Vermont
Country Deli**



and so much more...

We're conveniently located on Rt. 9 just 2/10 mile west of Exit 2 off I-91

**GOURMET TO GO
FRESH PASTRIES
VERMONT PRODUCTS**

436 Western Ave. • Brattleboro, VT
802-257-9254

www.vermontcountrydeli.com



LARGER THAN LIFE

Today, the legacy of Alice, Emily, and Wolf continues to ripple through the arts in Vermont. Their influence is alive, not as a memory, but as a living current.

Together, the family's foundations carry forward that current through grants, exhibitions, and arts education. The Wolf Kahn Foundation supports artists and arts organizations that nurture creativity and access. The Emily Mason | Alice Trumbull Mason Foundation champions underrepresented voices in abstract art while preserving the work and archives of both women. Between them, they have provided critical funding to the Vermont Studio Center, the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center, River Gallery School, and countless community arts initiatives across the state.

For Melany, that spirit of generosity is both an inheritance and calling. "My parents and grandmother believed that art should serve people," she says. "They saw creativity not as a luxury, but as a responsibility—a way to make the world a little better, a little more connected." That belief is what animates the Brattleboro Festival of Miniatures. In its intricate dollhouses, handcrafted scenes, and community collaborations, one can glimpse a continuation of her family's undying artistic ethos: precision balanced with play, color meeting form, and artistry born from empathy.

The Farm: A Foundation of Creativity

The road to the Kahn/Mason family farmhouse winds up a gentle hill just west of downtown Brattleboro, where the bustle of Main Street gives way to open fields and wooded mountainsides.

Here, among 300 acres of rolling pasture and forest, stands John Stark Farm, a place that seems to hum with history and imagination.

The farmhouse itself dates back to the late 1800s.

When Melany Kahn's parents, Wolf Kahn and Emily Mason, bought the property in 1968, it was little more than a hand-built relic of Vermont's agricultural past. There was no electricity, no running water, and only a woodstove to keep out the winter chill. "We had a hand pump in the sink, a party line phone and kerosene lamps," Melany recalls. "We didn't even get electricity until 1972. We were one of the last houses in Vermont to get hooked up to the grid."

The farm's original owner, John Stark, milked ten cows by hand and worked the land the old way, scything hay, hauling maple syrup, apples, and harvesting huge blocks of ice from the pond in winter. That same timeless, bucolic Vermont energy permeates everything throughout the property. Inside, the home is part family museum, part creative laboratory. Every wall holds a story: Paintings by Wolf Kahn, Emily Mason, and their peers; vintage quilts collected by Emily; and photographs of the family through the decades. In one room, bottles found on the farm filled with her father's pastel pigments gleam like jewels in the light. In Emily's bedroom, transcribed in her cursive, is a copy of Emily Dickinson's poem, "'Hope' is the thing with feathers" perched beside a Wolf Kahn landscape painting.

"I think anyone who steps inside feels it," Kahn says softly. "You can sense the years of creative energy here. It's like the house itself wants you to make something."

Down a narrow path behind the farmhouse sits Emily Mason's studio, a con-

verted blacksmith shop that once also served as a chicken coop—a juxtaposition that delighted her sense of humor. “I always wondered how they managed not to burn the place down,” Kahn says with a laugh. “But that’s my mom—she saw beauty in unlikely places.”

Beyond the house, a network of trails weaves through woods and meadows, past mossy stone walls and wild mushroom patches. On clear days, Mount Monadnock rises on the horizon like a guardian. “That view was one of my father’s favorite subjects,” Kahn says, looking toward the distant ridge. “He painted it hundreds of times, but it never looked the same twice.”

It’s no wonder, then, that the farm has become a place of pilgrimage for artists and thinkers from near and far. Kahn opens the property for invite-only creative retreats, board meetings, and residencies for friends, colleagues, and nonprofit leaders—particularly those connected to her parents’ foundations and the Brattleboro arts community. “The best and highest use of this farm,” she says, “is to host people who are doing good work in the art world.”

Over the years, the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center and the Wolf Kahn Foundation have held retreats here. So have writers, filmmakers, and nonprofit boards seeking a quiet place to work. Among them is Nicole Kassell, a friend from Kahn’s NYU film school days and the Emmy-nominated director of Netflix’s *Sirens* and HBO’s *Watchmen*. Kassell has developed scripts and visual boards in the very rooms where Emily Mason once painted. “We joke that the farm is an Emmy-nominated workspace now,” Kahn says, smiling. “It’s like the land wants to keep creating.”

Creativity, in fact, seems to seep from the soil. The farm’s cutting gardens provide flowers for The Porch Café,

while the orchard yields blueberries, apples and koshi pears each fall. Visitors are greeted by flocks of woodpeckers and bluebirds; heifers from a neighboring farm graze in the lower meadow through summer. Everywhere you look, there’s evidence of quiet collaboration between nature and art.

“There’s a feeling here that’s hard to put into words,” says Kahn. “Everyone who visits says the same thing—it’s like time slows down. You feel this incredible sense of peace, and at the same time, an urge to create. I think it’s the land’s way of reminding us what matters: presence, attention, beauty, connection.” From the farmhouse kitchen to the fairy trails winding through the woods, the John Stark Farm has become not only the foundation of Melany’s creativity, but also a living bridge between past and present—a place where art, memory, and community converge.

Foraging and Fairy Houses

Not far from the farmhouse, a narrow trail winds through maples and birches. Here, among the ferns and wild mushrooms, Melany Kahn finds another of her passions—one that, like her miniatures, celebrates the art of seeing. “I’ve always been drawn to small things,” notes Kahn. “Miniatures, fairy houses, mushrooms—it’s all the same impulse. It’s about slowing down and noticing what most people walk past.”

Kahn’s love of foraging began in childhood, wandering the woods of West Brattleboro with her parents. Her father, Wolf, loved the colors of the fields and the play of light through the trees; her mother, Emily, gathered mushrooms and herbs for the family kitchen. “They taught me early on to pay attention to the world,” she says. “To really look at it—to study how light moves, how textures change, how one color becomes another. For them, it was about painting.

For me, it became about foraging.”

That connection between nature and observation eventually led to her debut children’s book, *Mason Goes Mushrooming*, about her own son’s foraging adventures. Published in 2022 locally by Green Writers Press and beautifully illustrated by Ellen Korbonski, the picture book follows a young boy and his dog, Buddy, as they explore the Vermont woods through the seasons, searching for morels in spring, chanterelles in summer, and black trumpets in autumn. Along the way, Mason learns not just to identify mushrooms, but to understand the interconnectedness of the forest itself.

The book’s success—and its glowing reception among both children and parents—has deepened Kahn’s commitment to the idea that creativity can bridge generations. “Foraging and art have a lot in common,” says Kahn. “They both require presence, patience, and a willingness to get your hands dirty. You have to be curious. You have to love the process.”

The connection between the natural and the imagined runs through every aspect of Kahn’s life. On the farm, she has built a fairy trail where visiting children can discover miniature dwellings tucked among roots and ferns—tiny houses made from bark, shells, and twigs, each crafted with the same playful precision that defines her larger work. “The fairies live here year-round,” she says with a smile. “I just give them some good real estate.” To Kahn, these fairy houses, like the Festival of Miniatures, are more than fanciful creations—they are expressions of empathy and awareness. “When we make something small, we’re practicing care,” she says. “We’re saying, ‘This little world matters.’ That’s a powerful kind of love.” ■