

FLOURISH

Artist biographies and statements
Alphabetical by artist's last name

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Marguerite Adelman has spent 35 years working in education, government, and nonprofits, usually in an administrative capacity that uses her writing and communications skills. Her last job before retiring was Development Director for VSA Vermont; VSA Vermont led her back into the arts. In 1975, she began her career as a speech and theater teacher, but a hearing disability made teaching difficult and hearing aids were not particularly effective in the mid-1970s. So she moved from the classroom into public service/administration. For most of her working life, she kept her hearing disability under wraps. VSA Vermont allowed her to talk about it in a way that she had not been able to in the past. After all, no one wanted to hire a hearing-impaired communications director. She started painting over two years ago and found that it helps her see the world in different and new ways.

Marguerite Adelman statement: *"In 2015, my husband and I traveled to Australia, camping in the country's Aboriginal Red Center or outback. I fell in love with the complexity of Aboriginal art: its symbols, techniques, colors, and map like quality. Kata Tjuta is a range of 36 red ochre-colored domes in Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in the outback and is a sacred site for the Aboriginal people. It is believed that Aboriginal people have been around for 60-80,000 years. This piece is a tribute to these people who have sustained life on this planet for so long without destroying the environment and by living in community."*

* * *

Willow Bascom combines indigenous textiles and painting, architectural detail, and ancient body art with exuberant colors to produce her drawings of birds, animals, and insects. The natural world comes alive in her intricate drawings on paper, and her large-scale wall murals.

As a child, the artist lived seven years each in Saudi Arabia and Panama and traveled extensively around the world. A self-taught artist, her World Folk Art animals are both whimsical and colorful, reflecting the strong traditions, sense of place, and story that are culturally embodied in each animal.

Willow began drawing during her recovery from the devastation of lupus. She lost a decade on the couch in a deep cerebral fog and suffered extensive connective tissue damage that still affects her hands. Unable to work outside of the house gave her a sense of permission to explore her creativity. Her first project was an alphabet book, *Paisley Pig and Friends, a Multicultural ABC*. Always one to find the silver lining, she describes the book's origin, "When my dominant thumb stopped being able to grasp objects (like my pen), I had corrective surgery. My post-surgery therapist was the kindest of women, so when I learned she loved pigs I decided to draw one for her. It was also a test of my ability to draw. I could! Exuberant, I drew, pondering how to fill the pig: in plaid? With purple polka dots? No . . . paisley! Suddenly, visions of a variety of animals, each with alliterative fills, began to populate my mind and the alphabet book was born. After drawing Quails in a Quatrefoil and Argyle Alligators I realized that if I were to

choose carefully, each letter could highlight a different art style from around the world. It was the inception of my style!” Willow draws each animal by hand, with all the details, and then adds color with markers or in Photoshop, depending on how well her hands are working.

She has displayed her art in galleries in Maine, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont. Her book won the Silver Eureka! Nonfiction Children’s Book Award from the California Reading Association. She is a Master Teacher with the New England Quilt Museum and gives presentations on her textile collection and molas. Her major love is sharing her “Healing Journey through Art” with support groups and health professionals.

Willow Bascom statement: *“I call my art World Folk Art. There are two major influences. One: growing up in Saudi Arabia and Panama and traveling around four continents, I got to see the delight people all around the world take in decorating themselves, their buildings; everything around them. Two: I have lupus. I was essentially on the couch for over a decade and emerged unable to work outside the home. As I created memory books for my kids, I discovered I could draw. Whimsical, colorful African giraffes, Hopi hummingbirds, Mehndi elephants, Japanese whales, and more—interpretations of my childhood experiences—poured out of me and gave me such joy that I knew I had figured out “what I wanted to be when I grew up!” To celebrate Vermont’s commitment to farming (and my husband’s growing garden) I am currently drawing chickens, sheep, and pollinators like this hummingbird.”*

* * *

Larry Bissonnette is a disability rights advocate and artist who lives in Milton, Vermont. He has been painting, drawing, and taking photographs since he was a young child and exhibits his art regularly both locally and nationally. His work has been featured in two recent exhibitions at the Amy E. Tarrant Gallery at the Flynn, a solo exhibition in 2015 entitled, “Looking Out: The Self-Taught Art of Larry Bissonnette” and a 2016 group exhibition entitled “Amazing GRACE (Grassroots Arts and Community Effort) – Celebrating 40 Years of Artmaking” He was a juried artist show award winner in the 2016 South End Art Hop in Burlington. Most recently, his work was featured in a 2017 group exhibition at Lesley University entitled “3 Artists Celebrating Autism”.

In 1991, Larry learned to communicate through typing and began combining words with his art to express his thoughts and ideas. Over the past 20 years, he has been a featured presenter at many national educational conferences and has written and spoken on the topics of autism, communication and art. He is also both the subject and writer of an award winning film about his art and life, called, “My Classic Life as an Artist: A Portrait of Larry Bissonnette” (2005) and starred in a feature length documentary directed by Gerardine Wurzburg about adults with autism called “Wretches and Jabberers” (2010).

Larry Bissonnette statement: *“Painting is intuition expressed through pictures, pushed out like ocean waves from my hands. It is my way of expressing beautifully what I am feeling. My*

creative impulse speaks out as powerful strokes on the paint canvas, linking color and texture into a production of offbeat images, pleasing to the eyes of outsider art fans. The meaning of my letters and shapes is what you, the viewer, perceive within your world. You determine the meaning not me.

Going to see my art involves leaving your lively imaginations of post-impressionism works at the door of the art gallery and looking at my paintings like you would with a child's. My art is not looking to make a statement about my autism working to overcome the limitations of my disability through art.

Awestruck stories about the individual triumphing over the adversity of autism need to be lessened in favor of practicing art as the promotion of creative self-expression across all levels of open to art, ability.

Your coming to see my art should be your potentially life changing wake up call to do art and not just make missing the point conversation about art over wine and orders of fancy meat-filled pastry and cheese. Let's save those snacks for celebrating you're doing of art and sharing it with others."

** * **

Lindsay Bluto has spent her entire life in the Green Mountain State. She was born and raised in South Burlington but spent every summer of her childhood in North Hero, Vermont, on the shores of Lake Champlain. It was these rural experiences that seemed to influence her later artistic expressions and recurrent

themes of nature, greenery and floral motifs. She attended the Burlington Technical Center's Design and Illustration program as well as several college level art classes, however, she largely considers herself self-taught. Up until now, she had been afraid to take the plunge into the professional art world but her acceptance into this exhibit has shown her that sometimes the risk pays off. She favors mixed media and her work often incorporates acrylics, watercolor, paper and ephemera, inks, stamps and other miscellany that calls to her in the moment.

Lindsay Bluto statement: *“Creating art is a deeply personal act for me. It is an exploration of self, a spiritual experience, a therapeutic unraveling, and a way to process both my conscious and subconscious thoughts. It is something fun and very fundamental. I try to create as if nobody but me will ever see it. This gives me a freedom to experiment and “mess up” and to grow and learn. I consider color one of the most important tools in my artistic arsenal and use it freely. My style seems to be a work in progress; you will find elements of folk art and doodling as well as more traditional life studies. Common themes in my work consist of nature, specifically plants and flowers, butterflies and the female form. I work very intuitively and tend to not plan before I start, I feel my way through and have learned that the process can be just as enjoyable and important as the final result.”*

* * *

Makayla Cota finds her inspiration to paint close to home. This musical and artistic young woman has been living in Vermont

for most of her life and does not look far to find fuel for her creativity. Makayla's style can be described as abstract with hints of impressionism, and her art is given life mainly through a medium of watercolor paints. Encouragement from friends and family has emboldened her to experiment with mixed media and incorporate acrylic, oil pastels and techniques of layering into her work. Makayla's paintings are often influenced by scenes from her daily life, the seasons and holidays, and those who she cares about. She attends art classes on a weekly basis and has had some pieces displayed in the Champlain Valley Fair. Despite the heart and soul she includes in each piece of work, Makayla is not one to stockpile her paintings. Her friends and family are often the recipients of her creations and describe Makayla's passion for life as contagious and heartwarming. Makayla is delighted to be a part of this exhibit and takes great joy in sharing her love of art with everyone.

Makayla Cota statement: *"I love painting. I love all of the red paint and the purple color. The purple in the corner."*

* * *

Gwendolyn Evans is an Intuitive Healer and artist who happens to be blind. Working in several different mediums, she creates art using acrylics, clay, paper, recycled materials and inspiration. Gwendolyn accidentally found her artistic muse in midlife and has been hooked ever since. She enjoys expressing

creativity, whimsy, and beauty as a healing practice through her artwork.

* * *

Dan Fisher was born in Asheville, NC in 1952, educated at New York Studio School (1972) and Pratt Institute with a BFA in painting and drawing (1974). He has lived and worked in New York, Los Angeles and since 1996 in South Central Vermont.

Dan Fisher statement: *“This work is from a series of images that appeared complete in both design and color, while resting with my eyes closed. Usually in a darkened room. I had spent decades working on a geometric series using circle, square and triangle with primary and secondary colors, but the character and logic of these “apparitions” was distinctly different. The images eventually morphed into something more complex and figurative in nature.”*

* * *

Robert Alan Gold, throughout his life, whether teaching dentistry at Harvard University or being Captain in the Army, he always found ways to be creative. He was a full time dentist and a part time artist for 25 years, but after a traumatic brain injury in 1997, he devoted himself to art full time. Using digital manipulation and vivid colors, he developed his own style and has had mostly local shows around the state of Vermont, and by interacting with people and showing them his work, garners

commissions and sells into private collections. In 2011, he won a scholarship for the Vermont Studio Center Artist Residency program and developed his technique of painting on canvas. In 2012, he became Chaffee Gallery's Artist of Distinction. He has been working with printer Jon Cone, the inventor of digital printing since 2010 and collaborated on many pieces. Although he has been an artist for more than half a century, he still seeks the input of others to look forward to making mistakes so he can continue to grow. In the past two years, his art has been exhibited at UVM Medical Center, Burlington International Airport, and the Ava Gallery in Lebanon, New Hampshire. In 2013, he was a featured guest lecturer at the Bennington Museum. He was also featured on the cover of the Journal of Rehabilitation, Research and Development in November 2015. In 2016, he was voted the winner of the People's Choice Award at the Burlington Art Hop.

Robert Alan Gold statement: *"In all my art, I strive to uncover the extraordinary hidden within the ordinary. I find it is disturbingly easy to miss the beauty unfolding right in front of us. When my mobility became limited, I started to notice more and more beauty in my immediate surroundings. Focusing intently with my camera on appreciating the everyday in a new way helps me stay present. In my process, the composition of the photograph is more important than the color. I manipulate the colors in the computer and with acrylic paint. The vibrancy of the piece draws the viewer in and then the composition tells a story. The latest technology grants me the ability to experiment rapidly and my current pieces have benefited*

immeasurably. Using delicate hand detailing (with the aid of neuro-surgeon's operating glasses), and a sophisticated print process, I am able to expose the inner richness that lies buried just below the surface of our daily lives. I started by using museum etching paper in 8x11 sizes and my efforts have since progressed into larger pieces printed on Japanese Kozo paper, a material that has been used by oil painters for hundreds of years. Prior to this, I printed onto 30x40" canvases, before moving towards larger and larger prints on Kozo. I'd like to credit John Cone for his assistance in the printing of this particular piece as well."

* * *

Katrina Hagen was born in Littleton, New Hampshire before moving to Brattleboro, Vermont to attend Austine School for the Deaf. She graduated in 2004 and remains living in Brattleboro. When she was little, she was introduced to drawings and she got hooked into drawings, paintings, and craft-makings that allowed her to feel at ease and able to express her thoughts and feelings while creating her artworks. She has received award from the State of Vermont in Montpelier, VT in early 2000 for one of her artworks. Katrina has joined the trip to Sedona Arts Camp for Deaf and CODA* (*children of Deaf adults) in Sedona, Arizona in the summer of 2001 along with other artists. She has participated in Brattleboro's River Gallery School to create and promoting her artworks.

Katrina Hagen statement: *“I enjoyed blending different colors of watercolors into different layers of landscapes of natures, birds, and mountains onto special watercolor papers with brushes and sometimes I add other mediums like markers or other materials. I was inspired by Thomas Kinkade’s works, which are mostly colorful landscapes which I really liked.*

The “Country Swing” is based on my early childhood memory of my favorite swing under the tree at my grandmother’s farm. I enjoyed this painting which I felt at peace, calm, and being close to God.”

* * *

Jeffrey Hill had a near death experience, as a child, after being pulled out by the undertow at Sandy Hook Beach, New Jersey. As a result, Jeffrey’s nervous system became severely deregulated. Altered states of consciousness became the norm.

As a child, Jeffrey was pulled to art as a way of expressing what he couldn’t express any other way. He often would use anything he could find to draw, color, design, or paint with. Jeffrey did not have much support in life, especially during childhood. Yet, he would steal moments in hiding to create.

As an adult, Jeffrey has learned that he need not be fettered to his unregulated nervous system. Proceeds from his artwork go toward health care that is building its regulation. This is slowly opening up a new world for Jeffrey.

Jeffrey Hill statement:

“Beeswax

Blow torch

Razor blades

And

Love

Are necessary for me to create encaustic artwork.

I create as a way of communicating that which cannot be communicated in any other means.

I create as a way to release the Divine energy that flows through me

My creations using natural organic beeswax are an interpretation and an expression of the natural world.

Studying the encaustic medium is a journey built upon paradoxes. The laws of physics apply, yet it's never that clear cut or easy. Beeswax combined with damar resin is the basic recipe for the medium. Pigments are added to make the paint. The paint or medium is applied while it's in a molten state. The paint never dries it's either in a liquid state or solid.”

* * *

Annie Jackson is a poet, athlete, gardener, advocate for citizens with disabilities, and a talented fiber artist. She lives at Heartbeet Lifesharing in Hardwick, Vermont, a community that includes citizens with disabilities. Heartbeet is a member of the Camphill network of more than 120 communities worldwide where people with and without developmental disabilities live, work and share life together. Community members have a rich

artistic and cultural life and contribute to neighboring communities and to the world at large. Art is an integral element of life at Heartbeet for Annie and for all community members. A new Community Center dedicated to inclusion in the arts opened at Heartbeet in 2016. Its studio for fiber arts is home to thrice-weekly workshops in the art of needle felting.

When Annie first came to Heartbeet in 2009, she had doubts about making her permanent home in rural Vermont. However, she soon recognized and came to love the particular beauty of this unique part of the world. As she developed her skill in the art of needle felting, her felted pieces began to express her growing connection to the Vermont landscape in all its changing aspects. Today, her felted work expresses her feeling for the environment, her delight in the medium and materials of needle felting, and her developing sense of herself as an artist.

Annie Jackson statement: *“I love this image. I feel like I am there looking at that house. It brings me peace. Art is the part of me that I like to come alive. It allows me to be a part of a group; and that inspires me.”*

* * *

Todd Julius is a self-taught artist. Raised in Southern Vermont. A graduate of UVM, where he majored in computer science and Chinese philosophy. He started painting only after a brain injury and stroke prevented him from working or continuing many

with his favorite physical and cognitive hobbies. Art became therapeutic. A decade later Todd still finds catharsis and healing in the way watercolors teach control loss and acceptance.

* * *

Anna King was born in Seattle and grew up in Shelburne, Vermont. Anna has liked art since she was a child. She suffered a brain injury at the end of senior year in high school that left her with right-sided weakness and expressive aphasia. Over the years of recovery, Anna used her artwork to express her grief and process the losses in her life. Always the optimist, her joy and gratitude in life is also reflected in her work. She created a number of drawings in watercolor that chronicled her experience. Before the accident, her right hand was dominant, but she has adapted to having her left hand do all the work.

Anna King statement: *“My watercolor is an expression of my gratitude for Eastern and Western healing I experience as I move forward in my life. Expressive aphasia is like a black hole where there are so many feelings but few words. I could not name my despair after my accident except through painting. It has been an outlet for which I did not need words. I’ve been painting since pre-school so it is an old, welcomed friend with no judgement. After my accident, there was this pain deep inside me that I needed to acknowledge. I lived for three years at the Center for Mindful Learning where I studied and practiced mindful meditation. For the past year, I have practiced under Roshi Graef at the Vermont Zen Center in Shelburne.*

Meditation and artwork are both important in my life—one feeds the other and keeps my life sustained.

* * *

Alexis Kyriak was born in New York in 1950 and did not begin seriously studying art until 1976, when she entered Fashion Institute of Technology in a fine arts degree program that gave her a solid grounding in classical study: anatomy, perspective, design, drawing, and the techniques of oil painting. After FIT she attended the Art Students League, the National Academy of Fine Art and Design, Brooklyn Museum School, Westchester Art Workshop, Westchester Community College, apprenticed both with Peggy Fuller of Golden Arches Studio in Mount Kisco, New York and Jeanne Carbonnetti of Crow Hill Gallery in Chester, Vermont.

She has shown at Studio Place Arts, Helen Day in Stowe, receiving awards for three consecutive years, and Artful Things in Lebanon, New Hampshire and is presently showing at Artists in Residence in Enos-burg Falls, Vermont. She is published in Jeanne Carbonnetti's book "The Yoga of Drawing". She was also a part of a documentary called "They Have Souls Too" by Helen Whitney of the Whitney Museum, New York.

Alexis Kyriak statement: *"Coming to Vermont in 1991, my art began to finally be realized independently, and a true path started to become clear. The atmosphere here has been very fertile for my work, living in Johnson Vermont, an art colony*

centered on a year—round residency program called Vermont Studio Center. This community has been a spiritual journey of art = necessity and providence, friendship and synchronicity... small miracle after miracle. I began to realize how deeply beauty was important to me and to pursue it without reserve or hesitation.

What I am looking for is cached in the word “create”. For me, the deep need to paint is intimating something that would greatly fulfill my journey. I question why and what, and how. Psychology, aesthetics, and the phenomena of painting itself . . . including physics, the study of what makes the world go round, and metaphysics are all included in that point of light I am going toward. The material I read is scriptural and theological. There is also parapsychology and physics, the meaning of the Liturgy and the experience of it as my axis. Spirituality not divorced from any aspect of life, and integrating those aspects is understood through space exploration and the thinking of artists who have led up to the steps I take personally in actually painting.”

* * *

Carol Langstaff is a choreographer, performer, teacher, and now photographer. Founder of Revels North and Flock Dance Troupe.

Carol Langstaff statement: *“My art has always been a celebration of what I notice and what I care about. I embrace*

the joy and wisdom that can be found in the forces of our natural world, which transcend our day-to-day concerns. Responding to the flow forms of nature and the language of gesture has been my passion. Now since my stroke I no longer herd people, but have been given the opportunity to do more observing, using my camera.”

* * *

Michael Leavitt was born in Vermont and lived here his entire life. He is a 2006 graduate of Hartford High School. Michael has autism and a seizure disorder. He loves art, particularly drawing, and is quite good at it. His artistic talent and pursuits have branched out to include photography, videography, and acting. In high school, and for several years after graduation, he videotaped government meetings and community events like the Quechee Balloon Festival for the local public access television station. He is very active in his community with volunteer work, at such places as the VA, and Woodstock Terrace on the Dementia Unit. In his spare time, he takes art classes at AVA Gallery, attends Zack’s Place and Spark Center, and is an active participant in the Special Olympics, competing in bowling, snowshoeing, basketball, track and field, and golf. This is Michael’s second time to be included in an exhibit . . . the first being in 2012-2013, VSA’s Engage Exhibit.

* * *

Winnie Looby is a multi-disciplinary artist, who is originally from much farther south. Her professional experiences have

included performing as an actor, dancer, and musician, but her first love is visual art. She enjoys both solo and collaborative projects that allow her to combine all of her interests at once. She has participated in group shows for the Rose Street Artists' Cooperative, ONE Arts Center, Burlington City Arts, and FLYNNDOG. Most recently, she has been exploring digital art and creating costumes for modern dance performances.

Winnie Looby statement: *“My aesthetic has been shaped by the surrealism of our human mythology, and what is literally right in front of me at any given moment. This beautiful chaos has included raising a family, and now I am also navigating the world of academia. The piece included in this exhibition was assembled from a variety of recycled objects. As part of my self-care, I have learned to make simple tinctures from fresh kitchen herbs. I have found that the properties of the sage plant help to support my immune system year-round.”*

* * *

Karen J. Lloyd grew up inspired by the vibrant contemporary arts community of her hometown, Mystic, Connecticut. In 2004, she graduated with departmental honors from the University of Vermont with a B.A. in English and minor in animal studies. An art professor encouraged her to pursue art professionally, but it would be five years after graduation until she decided to take the plunge into art exhibits and craft shows. Not content to be limited to one medium, she has thrown her creative energy not only into digital photography

and acrylic painting, but has also excelled at the customization and painting of realistic miniature model horses using mixed media of pastels, acrylics, and colored pencils. Her award-winning photography has been featured in numerous exhibitions in Vermont and can be found in private collections throughout the United States and internationally.

Karen J. Lloyd statement: *“Amidst the challenges of living with chronic tick illness and fibromyalgia, I have continued to explore the realm of natural aesthetics in my acrylic paintings and photography. Through whimsical beauty and dramatic contrasts, I endeavor to spark reflection upon our relationships with the animals and landscapes increasingly overlooked in a fast-paced, human-oriented society, with the hope of evoking an emotional thread to our natural surroundings. Ultimately, my pursuit is to capture and share the essence of my subject. One of the greatest compliments for me as an artist was witnessing two viewers moved to tears by my photograph ‘Soul Therapy.’ One of them confessed that she did not consider herself a ‘horse person,’ and went on to explain her amazement at how even so, this photograph of therapy horse Ladybug made her relate to her own personal experiences in ways she found hard to fully articulate into words. For me, creating art that awakens a deeper emotional connection is one of the most extraordinary and rewarding challenges to achieve. Within a single piece, there is often suggestion of an allegorical dichotomy of light and dark: tempering the interweaving threads of perseverance, challenges and ‘storms,’ with themes of empathy, hope and joy.”*

* * *

Lennon Manson is a largely self-taught artist from Central Vermont. His intricate, twisting designs are often created from the letters of the alphabet, layered heavily over and over again, creating works that are as surreal as they are colorful. He loves watching wrestling and stand-up comedy, and these pastimes inform his work with a dynamic explosion of color and movement and also a sly sense of wit. His artwork is heavily featured in the pages of Shockwave Magazine, an Arts magazine celebrating the art and written word of intellectually disabled adults. His artwork has also been featured in group shows at Studio Place Arts and the Aldrich Public Library, both in historic downtown Barre, Vermont.

* * *

Justin McQuiston lives in Williston, Vermont. He was not very interested in art until middle school when he started drawing. In 2012, his mixed media piece “Dragon” was accepted in the VSA and CVS Caremark All Kids Can CREATE exhibition “What Inspires Me.” The exhibition featuring artwork from children of all abilities representing each state debuted at Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library in Washington DC. CVS Caremark, sponsor of this program, decided to keep the exhibit within their art collection, and Justin’s artwork is displayed at CVS headquarters in Rhode Island.

In high school, Justin began drawing sports team logos with

great detail, developing his observation and drawing skills. He took several art classes: Intro to Art, Ceramics and then Advanced Drawing and Painting. He is presently working on his graduation challenge which includes several exhibits of his artwork in Williston. Justin hopes to take more art classes in college.

Justin McQuiston statement: *“I like to draw a lot; my favorite thing to draw is sports team logos. I like to draw people playing sports and I liked drawing jars and light on the glass for my class. I am working a lot on shadows now. In painting class, I learned about underpainting and shadows. I like to paint the lake and mountains and self-portraits. I also like to make giant sports logos in the grass with a lawn mower or in the snow”.*

* * *

Michelle Monroe enjoys using her natural eye for color to create works of art and gifts for family and friends. Over two years she has worked with both acrylic and watercolor, but watercolor is her favorite medium.

Born in Princeton, New Jersey in 1970, Michelle was raised in Quebec and has lived in Vermont since age 14. She is the mother of four beautiful children. She worked a range of jobs, but time spent caring for her elderly grandfather inspired Michelle to take on nursing school. That goal was cut short by multiple sclerosis, “but, I survived.” Michelle says. She maintains a generous spirit.

Artistically, Michelle was inspired by local artist Corrine Yonce. Corrine's recent piece *Voices of Home*, is a collection of audio interviews and painted portraits, and includes Michelle as a subject. The collection highlights personal benefits of housing opportunities provided through Vermont's affordable housing coalition. The South Burlington Community House (SBCH) is a community care home where Michelle has been living since 2013. A community care home for adults living in wheelchairs provides not only accessibility but also day-to-day independence, and community. Michelle, enriched by the environment, hopes to help spread the word about its usefulness for others.

Michelle finds that the relaxing yet accomplishing nature of working on art can bring enrichment to any life, no matter what you are coping with.

* * *

Lissa Nilsson was born in Flint, Michigan in 1968. Nilsson is currently exploring acrylic painting, but also does watercolor, pastels, pencil, and colored pencil drawing. She won several awards in high school art competitions, and started college as an Art Major. After deciding she did not want to starve, Nilsson went on to earn a B.A. in geography from Mount Holyoke.

Before losing her job due to chronic illness, Nilsson had a successful 15-year career as a Senior Geographic Analyst for

NAVTEQ, making digital maps for GPS navigation. She has been mostly housebound and operating at about 30% of her former self since becoming ill in 2010.

Returning to her roots in art has brought immense satisfaction and a sense of purpose to her life. In 2015, some of Nilsson's acrylics were selected for an online, yearlong, juried show featuring artists disabled with ME/CFS. Nilsson resides in Ferrisburgh, VT with her amazing husband and two wonderful cats.

Lissa Nilsson statement: *"My acrylics are an exploration of self. Still in the early stages of teaching myself to paint, I am just beginning to develop a style. Landscapes are simple and built of memories of the feelings that favorite places evoke. Because I have been unable to travel much since becoming ill with ME/CFS eight years ago, I am drawn to finding ways to express what she I miss most. Perhaps a painting can take me there, when my body cannot.*

This painting expresses the reality of life with ME/CFS....and it portrays the hopes we cling to.

The bars of the cage have various symptoms written on them. The figure inside is shadowy, featureless, and bordering invisible. The cage is too small, there is nowhere to go, and even if there were room, there is not the energy to stand up. The "Activity Graveyard" is in clear view of the cage, a constant reminder of what we have lost. Written on each headstone are the favorite activities we can no longer do because of our chronic illness. They fade off into the horizon, just like our

memories of better times. Our “world” has been shattered, and the pieces floating to the foreground represent various things that have been lost or destroyed due to chronic illness. Life rushes past us, but we are isolated and alone, left behind on another planet - that the rest of the world cannot understand. The balloon is tethered to the hefty weight of ME/CFS, which is holding us down, and keeping us caged. If only the hopes/needs represented on the balloon would come to fruition, perhaps we can be freed at last. The balloon is lifted by the flame of advocacy that is slowly building to help us in the fight to be recognized. The prayer flags attached to the rope list some of the phenomenal personal attributes that help us survive such an invisible and broken life . . . inner strength, resilience, determination, stoicism, and patience. This painting is a window into a remote, shadowy world of chronic illness that people cannot know the true depths of until they’ve lived it themselves.”

* * *

James Prim, born in 1981 and raised in Milton, Vermont. He attended Milton High School and graduated in 2000.

James Prim statement: *“I work at Kinney Drugs and I have been working for Kinney for more than 15 years. I love to use the scrubber and buffer. I like to sweep the floor and I like helping customers find what they are looking for in the store. I like playing my guitar, I like working on my math exercises, I like bowling, I like swimming, I like going to the airport and watch*

airplanes, I enjoy going to Grace arts and work on my art. I was inspired by my work to draw this piece, the art about me. I am mopping the floor in and customers are in the store. I love this because it represented what I do at my job.”

* * *

Sasha Ross Becker grew up in Middlesex, Vermont, including her college years in Burlington, and currently lives in Brooklyn, New York, working as a graphic artist.

Sasha Ross Becker statement: *“My displayed art was a long delayed response to my brain tumor and resulting treatments. I experienced three brain surgeries and a month of radiation. Several of my works of art support this traumatic experience I went through as an adolescent. The print of the threaded needle coming out of the head focused on this experience and represents how my development was similar to a cut of fabric that needed to be re-sewn. My life at this time was similar to a disheveled array of clothing with ripped seams causing major disruptions unexplainable to many friends and family members close to me. However, the fabrics of my life continue to be sewn into new creations.”*

* * *

Eva Seyller. Besides drawing, her other interests include beaded jewelry design, photography, and folk dance at North End Studios. Eva gets her inspiration from life experiences, photographs and stories, and transforms them into abstracted

images with bold colors and shapes. Her drawing *Sheep on the Road* was inspired by a photograph her aunt took while traveling in Scotland.

* * *

Kaelyn Marie Shannon is an 18-year old senior at Spaulding High School in Barre, Vermont. She first started her love of the arts as a way to cope with the loss of her 13-year old brother and best friend Aiden. They both had the same disability that bonded them in ways we may never completely understand. Kaelyn is resilient, loving, compassionate, and kindhearted. She is so proud of everything she has accomplished. Her beautiful spirit shines through in her art. She is thrilled to share it with you.

* * *

Jonah Sprout's passion for art extinguished by middle school teachers. Rekindled by M, J.T. + classmates at BTC Design and Illustration program. Self-extinguished thinking he had to do it for \$. Started again thank to Body Awareness class and classmates at CCV. Currently working on self-biofeedback with sound and touch. Also, drawings that work with defocused eyes while vibrating with glassy mirrored waves undulating, flickering lights back and forth.

Jonah Sprout statement:

"i'm interested in

*The Venn Diagram of creative process while in
flow/trance/dissociative states*

Yoga, Pilates, mediation

Breathing

Asymmetry

Mechanical processes imitating nature and vice versa

Following mistakes and realizing most of them aren't

Figuring out what's random and what isn't

Working with autonomous feedback systems

*Testing the theory of an inexhaustible supply of
love"*

* * *

Melody Squires is from Guilford, Vermont.

Melody Squires statement: *"I have two types of Cerebral Palsy and I am confined to a wheelchair all the time and I have a speech problem. It's very hard to understand me, but the more that you're with me; my speech is easier to understand. From my Cerebral Palsy, I cannot use my arms that easily, so I use a headstick to paint or type with. It's like a helmet that sits right on my head with a rod coming out to use. I attach a paintbrush to the rod. When I paint, it is very relaxing to me that sometimes, I forget what I am doing. My mind likes to wander as I am painting. I am very surprised at what I can paint by myself because I never thought that I'd ever paint in my life. It's very enlightening to me to see my artwork after I am finished with a painting.*

My expedition of my painting is of green grass and blue sky on a beautiful spring day! There is a hill that has a tree in the background and in front of the trees; there are two flowers that are so beautiful that you can smell the fragrance of them. There are fluffy clouds dancing around the blue sky.”

* * *

Kathy Velon lives and works in her own studio in North Bennington, Vermont. She received a B.A. in Fine and Applied Art from Rochester Institute of Technology in 1978 and M.A. in Deaf Education from Boston University in 1996. Between 1978-1993, she has had worked as graphic design assistant, design production supervisor, and freelance paste-up artist with the past agencies: Mitchell & Webb, Inc., Winkler Design, Inc., Bene Communication, Inc, and Hahn International, Inc., all in Boston area. Between 1990–2001, she assisted in two summer arts camps at Vermont Art Exchange in North Bennington and Sedona Arts Camp for Deaf and CODA* (*children of Deaf adults) in Sedona, Arizona. Between 1996-2005, she taught primary education and choice-based art education to preK–12 hard-of-hearing and deaf/Deaf children at former Austine School for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing.

Kathy Velon statement: *“I decided to explore learning and gaining the trust of my own inner creative voice through intuitions and inspirations. I did some re-readings on intuition and spirituality to encourage myself to leap and find out if I have that boldness to give a birth of creative action into my*

world of making arts and sharing my delightful results. My quiet lifelong passion has been about using one of my favorite art elements, the hues. It's stood steadfastly by me while all those years I explored various materials and mediums until I found creating paper arts were in harmony with my love of hues. In developing my working series, I found my creative niche is combining the handmade papers as working surfaces for the batiked waxing, dyes spraying, and beads embroidering to produce the visual harmonized patterns and balances in my series. This VSA curator-selected piece on display in this show is being one of many pieces I have created."

* * *

Pamela Spiro Wagner, who signs her work under the moniker pamwagg, is an entirely self-taught artist. She started making art and doing it nearly non-stop in 2008 after what she calls the "miracle of a small brain bleed." She has exhibited in Wethersfield, Hartford, and Norwich, Connecticut. In June 2017, her art was on exhibit for a month at the Hooker Dunham Theater Gallery in Brattleboro, after the opening reception for her third book of poems as well as her art, *LEARNING TO SEE IN THREE DIMENSIONS*, which was published by Vermont's own Green Writers Press and Sundog Poetry Center. Two of her life-size papier maché sculptures are on permanent display in Norwich, Connecticut at the Otis Library. Her unusual but highly skilled drawings have appeared with accompanying poems in the new magazine, *Collective DreamArts*. Wagner currently resides Brattleboro, Vermont where she teaches art privately.

Wagner is also an award-winning writer and poet, despite having spent many years of her life in and out of psychiatric hospitals and units, diagnosed with schizophrenia. She has written for *Tikkun* and the *Sunday New York Times Magazine* as well as others. In 2001/2, she shared a First Place in the BBC World Service Meridian Writings International Poetry Competition, judged by Nobelist Wole Soyinke for her poem "The Prayers of the Mathematician." With her identical twin sister, a psychiatrist, Wagner co-authored the popular memoir, *DIVIDED MINDS: Twin Sisters and their Journey through Schizophrenia* (St. Martin's Press, 2005), which won the national NAMI Outstanding Literature Award and was a finalist for the 2006 Connecticut Book Award. Her first book of poems, *WE MAD CLIMB SHAKY LADDERS*, published by Cavankerry Press in 2009, was a finalist for Poetry Book of the Year in Foreword Magazine.

Pamela Spiro Wagner statement: *"This drawing is #4 in a series I did while hospitalized in psychiatric hospitals in Connecticut, having been diagnosed for decades with schizophrenia. In psychosis, literally everything has meaning, so images often pour out unfiltered and uncensored, transforming terror into stream-of-consciousness art. I did not start doing art until I was 55 when I woke up one morning, sometime after a small brain bleed, with the message in my brain, "You have to build a human." I set to work and in a couple of months, Decorated Betsy was the result, a life-size papier maché woman seated in a chair that won an award and sold to an art collector shortly*

thereafter. Since that time, I have not stopped doing art, though I did stop making papier maché sculptures long enough to teach myself to draw.

People are often curious about the images in NOT WAVING BUT DROWNING, many of which are quite personal. While the viewer is invited to draw her own conclusions from the drawing, since they can mean many different things, nevertheless, I did have certain intentions, which I feel it would be helpful to share. For example, whenever I use the biohazard sign, the red and black symbol, even distorted, this represents how I felt about myself. The drawing on the upper right in the picture, of the leper's bell, does the same. The title of the picture was taken from a Stevie Smith poem that has always been a favorite and ends, "I was much too far out all my life/ And not waving but drowning."

While many of the images in NOT WAVING BUT DROWNING are grim and reflect my state of mind, there is also some humor, as you can see in the use of the empty fishbowl atop a box holding a "cat, dead or alive, property of Schrodinger." Art means a lot of things to different people but for me it literally saved my life. It also changed it forever. Making art has given me an entirely new lease on living and a way to go on, with hope and with energy and with excitement for each new day. What more could someone at 65 ask?"

** * **

Gail Wheeler was born in Massachusetts, and now lives in Burlington, Vermont. Her early career focused on early childhood education. She designed and built a model preschool, and was master teacher in Tufts University's laboratory preschool. She moved to Vermont in 1979 and was director of the University of Vermont's laboratory preschool (ECDC). Gail spent two years traveling and developing her art practice in Ecuador and Mexico. Upon return, she taught at Vermont College and completed a doctorate in *Art: Transformative Studies in Culture and Psyche* (1992) from The Union Institute in Cincinnati. She retired in 2000. In addition to her art practice, Gail currently teaches tai chi in Burlington for Age Well, and in Essex for the Vermont

Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired. She has exhibited in faculty shows at Vermont College's Wood Art Gallery in Montpelier and at Endicott College in Beverly, Massachusetts. This is her first juried art show.

Gail Wheeler statement: *“Three central elements inform my artwork: meditation, the particular medium I am using, and tai chi practice. My early work consisted of intricate, tightly controlled, pen and ink mandalas, created while curled up in a chair, each mark drawing me into a meditative state. Limited vision, brought on 15 years ago by macular degeneration, provided an opportunity for me to experience a new phase of work. I explored a variety of materials, and chose to work with water-based gouache and acrylic inks. The use of these free-flowing materials encouraged a loosening of control and a freer*

approach to painting. In recent years, learning and teaching tai chi, with its principles of movement, focus and balance, has brought another layer of awareness, freedom, and movement to my work. I stand instead of sit; I move instead of curling up. Tai chi, often called a 'moving meditation' influences my current painting process: a dance, a whole-body experience, my visual 'moving meditation.'"