



Transient no more

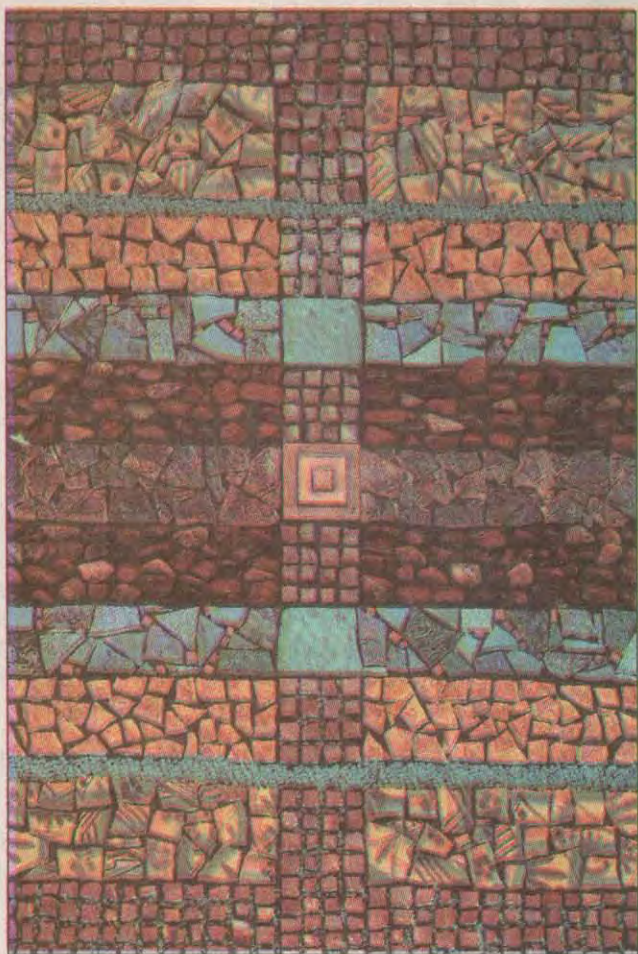


Amy Melville of King Mountain Fiber Arts creates lace by tatting.



Daily Progress photos/Megan Lovett

Amy Melville (center) helps Angela (left) and Christina Salidis try on necklaces at C'ville Arts, a cooperative gallery on the Downtown Mall.



Virginia Gardner's mosaics are sold at the 10-year-old co-op.

'Crafters' celebrate 10 years with new name, good home

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The challenges that often accompany an artistic career can be as varied as they are daunting.

Creating art is often an individual endeavor that can have an isolating effect on the artist. At the other extreme is the all-important aspect of selling the art, which usually benefits from the widest possible exposure to the buying public.

A decade ago a handful of local crafters joined forces to help remedy both these problems of artistic life. Their answer was to found Transient Crafters.

The name recently changed to C'ville Arts to better define what the cooperative gallery is all about, but the concept of working together for

the benefit of all remains unchanged, and continues to flourish.

"Ten years ago a small group of crafters decided to start a seasonal retail outlet for their work," said Amy Melville, a fiber artist who serves as administrator for the shop at 118 E. Main St. on Charlottesville's Downtown Mall.

"They rented a space in the downtown area and sold their work for a month at Christmas time. They really enjoyed it, and it went well, so they repeated doing it for the next two years.

"Each holiday season it was in a different location, so that's how the name Transient Crafters came about. Seven years ago the group decided to become a full-time, year-round retail outlet.

"They were at a location on First Street for a year and then we moved

C'VILLE ARTS

www.charlottesvillearts.com

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Crafters

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into this location six years ago. During that time we have grown from a dozen members to 61 members at the present."

A visit to the shop, which is open daily, provides plenty of evidence for its ongoing success. From ceiling to floor and on display tables throughout the store are examples of beautifully rendered items in a broad range of artistic disciplines.

There's pottery, glass, jewelry, paintings, photography, herbal products, soaps, candles, collage, sculpture, woodworking, metalwork, tiles, clocks and mosaics. In one area hangs examples of Melville's tatting, which is a form of lace making that was popular during the Victorian era.

Nearby is a display of copper bird feeders and trays created by Vasse Vaught Metalcrafting in Christiansburg. The copper comes from scrap pieces left over from roofing jobs.

Big craft show

On a recent afternoon a person spent several minutes just admiring the exquisitely crafted letter openers and walking canes that Alan Cleveland created from exotic hardwoods. He laminates different woods together to produce intricate patterns and then gives them a silky, smooth finish by using gun oil over paste wax.

"Visiting the store is like going to a big craft show without having to wander around to all the different booths," Melville said. "It's a place where you can find a tremendous variety of different kinds of things and know they're all handmade and they're going to be unique."

"A lot of the artists and crafters who started the cooperative would do a lot of shows, but didn't have a place where they could sell their work the rest of the year. So they were looking for someplace that when they saw someone at a show who liked their work, they could tell them where their things were available all the time."

"They felt that with Charlottesville being such a supportive community for the arts that it could support this kind of retail outlet. The main drive was to have someplace that was an alternative to doing shows, because that is such hard work and pretty unpredictable in terms of income."

Ben Greenberg joined the cooperative soon after moving to Charlottesville five years ago. He said C'ville Arts has literally changed his life.

"I have been a photographer for almost 38 years and lived in Richmond most of my life," said Greenberg, who is serving as co-president of the nonprofit organization. "Richmond has a thriving art community, but amazingly Charlottesville rivals what it does or tries to do in that respect."

"C'ville Arts has provided me with a vehicle to share my work with the public in a way I never have had before. Having my work in a Downtown Mall setting al-



Daily Progress photos/Megan Lovett

A wall in C'ville Arts cooperative gallery features works by Ben Greenberg. The gallery is celebrating its 10th anniversary.



Ben Greenberg, one of 60-plus juried artists and crafters at the gallery, offers nature photography.



Steve and Lisa Cunningham, known as the Bead Brothers, sell their works at C'ville Arts.

lows me to share it with people from all over the world.

"And being a member of C'ville Arts has exposed me to people I would have never been exposed to. Another thing I love about it is how we all work together and help each other."

Cooperation and a high standard of quality have translated into success for the shop. Prospective members are selected through a juried process and are required to submit actual samples of their work so that its quality can be assessed.

Melville said the members are always looking for things that are a bit differ-

ent, but steer away from souvenir-type things. The aim is to offer handmade, one-of-a-kind items made by Virginia artists.

"We try to protect our members' work, so we try to only have one of a certain kind of art," Melville said. "Although we have seven or eight jewelers, each works in a different style."

"So we're looking for things that don't duplicate what we already have. And because we are a cooperative, we ask more of our members than a consignment shop would."

"We do give high priority to people who can work in the shop. That's important to us, because we have to have people to man the counter."

The cooperative offers different categories of membership. Melville said it either pays a flat fee and then has a smaller commission, or pays a larger commission without the flat fee.

Members who don't work in the shop are on a straight, higher commission. On average working members put in about 12 hours a month behind the counter. That will vary anywhere from 10 hours a month during the summer up to as much as 16 hours a month during the busy holiday season.

Working members also are asked to take on an administrative or housekeep-

ing task of some kind that will entail about two hours of work a month. These chores can be anything from cleaning to handling shipping.

Founding members

Lisa Cunningham and her husband, Steve, are two of the founding members of the cooperative. Their line of expertise is turning old jewelry into new and interesting things, such as earrings and necklaces.

"The cooperative has been a great way for us to be a part of a community of artists," said Lisa Cunningham, who is the treasurer for the group. "Creating our art is kind of a hobby for us, and we don't try to make a living at it."

"So C'ville Arts provides us with a place where we can sell our work and not have a lot of overhead expenses. I think it's incredible that a group of artists this large can work together, get along and run this business that has been incredibly successful."

"People living in this area are used to things like the Crozet Arts and Crafts Festival. Many of them know they can come to C'ville Arts and find the work of many of those same artists all the time."

One of the things that lets passersby know they're right outside a unique shop is an eye-catching love seat created by Virginia Gardner. The couch was sculpted from polystyrene and covered with concrete.

Gardner then inset pieces of glass, ceramics and items meaningful to C'ville Arts' members into the concrete to create a mosaic design. The process of creating the sculpture is documented at the artist's Web site www.virginiamosaics.com.

"The loveseat is my gift to C'ville Arts," said Gardner, who joined the cooperative about two years ago. "I was the director of Second Street Gallery for four years and also ran a gallery for Virginia artists at the Virginia Museum."

"So I have an understanding of what artists go through. When I got back into creating art after not doing so for 20 years, I knew how important it was to get my art out there for people to see."

"The cooperative made so much sense to me from a marketing perspective. I don't think you could ask for a better location in Charlottesville, and I realized that was where I needed to be."

"When I went into the shop to ask how one became a member, the warmth I felt coming from those people was remarkable. They have had a tremendous impact on my growth as an artist. It's a difficult feeling for me to express in words, but there's a very real, palpable energy in the group and in the way the members support each other."

Virginia artists from as far away as West Point and as near as Crozet and Batesville showcase their art in the Downtown Mall shop. But the benefits of membership go beyond having a year-round retail outlet to sell art.

"We have a member who drives down from Northern Virginia to work her hours," Melville said. "A couple comes up from Lynchburg to do their hours, so you can see people are willing to make a huge commitment to being here."

"Many of our members have told me how much they enjoy interacting face to face with customers and getting a lot of good feedback from them. They also often express how much they like being part of a community of artists."

"As artists we spend large amounts of time working by ourselves, so having that camaraderie is important to many of us. I often hear members commenting how it feels like a family, and it really does."