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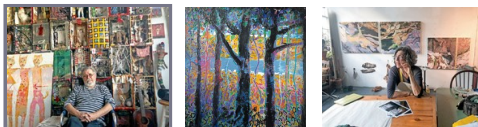
## YoHo artists' flare stems from Riverdale resources

Posted June 8, 2018



Lee Romero is one of several artists from Riverdale participating in an open studio at YOHO Artists in Yonkers, NY. Members of the public will be able to take a peek inside each artist's studio.

Courtesy of Mary Hardiman



By SIMONE JOHNSON

If Manhattan's SoHo strut and Yonkers' artistic community were to ever have a baby, it would be the YoHo Artists Studio.

Paying homage to the city's artsy lower Manhattan district, YoHo sprouted in the late 1980s as one of New York's largest hub for artists and their studios, attracting talent from many places, especially Riverdale.

A lot of that art was on display last month when some 50 artists opened their personal workspaces, letting the public witness where their creations begin.

"I want people to gain an appreciation for artwork and to really see the inside story of how an artist lives," said YoHo artist and Riverdalian Shelley Haven. "I'm not working when they come in, but they see my work environment. There's work on the wall, but they get to see me as an artist."

Although the studio is on Nepperhan Avenue in Yonkers, it is home to many Riverdale artists who have had their work exhibited throughout the region in art galleries, museums, universities and financial institutions. The YoHo studio — once the Alexander Smith carpet mills industrial complex — is now a space filled with a number of art studios and a hub for diverse creativity.

This was YoHo's 15th year opening its studios to the public, making these workspaces their own work of art. Visitors are given freedom to tour these studios to see first hand where their artistic process begins.

Some rooms, like Kristina Thorstenson's, are filled with dolls, while others have metal designs scattered everywhere like David Fischweicher's. These Riverdale residents not only illustrate the diversity in tools artists use in their creations, but that there is a creative vein that pulses in Yonkers similar to what might be found in Manhattan, thanks to that Riverdale influence.

"There are more (artists) from Riverdale than any other community, and it has been that way for a very long time," said open studio event organizer Adam Shultz. "We come from all walks of life here, and we use many different mediums in our work."

The artists range from painters and sculptors to installation artists and printmakers.

As a nature enthusiast, Shelley Haven gets most of her inspiration from the environment. She moved from the hipster-filled borough of Brooklyn to green Riverdale when her neighborhood began to get overcrowded.

But after moving here, Haven discovered inspiration in Wave Hill and Van Cortlandt Park.

Her hope is that when people see her work, they develop an appreciation for the environment and art itself. When working, Haven uses all sorts of art modes like oil, pastels, graphite and printmaking.

Everyone's "art is very different, which can be very interesting for visitors when they pop in and out," Shultz said. "There's really something for everyone."

Artists and art enthusiasts were not the only ones looking to take a peek behind the curtain. Curators, collectors, designers and creative professionals also made their way out to this annual occasion in hopes of finding something to catch their eye.

"It's a labor of love, so there's some things I give away or sell for like \$10," Haven said. "The sky is the limit with my more expensive paintings."

She usually gets to sell more of her less-expensive art at the open studio, like postcards she's designed. Although it would be nice to have more sales, Haven instead is focused more on community outreach through what she would call the "unexpected" experience of the open studio event.

Like most creative professionals, Haven has had to juggle a few other jobs over the years to stay afloat. But she doesn't regret it for one moment.

"I've had a very good life," she said. "I work hard. I have a lot to show for it."