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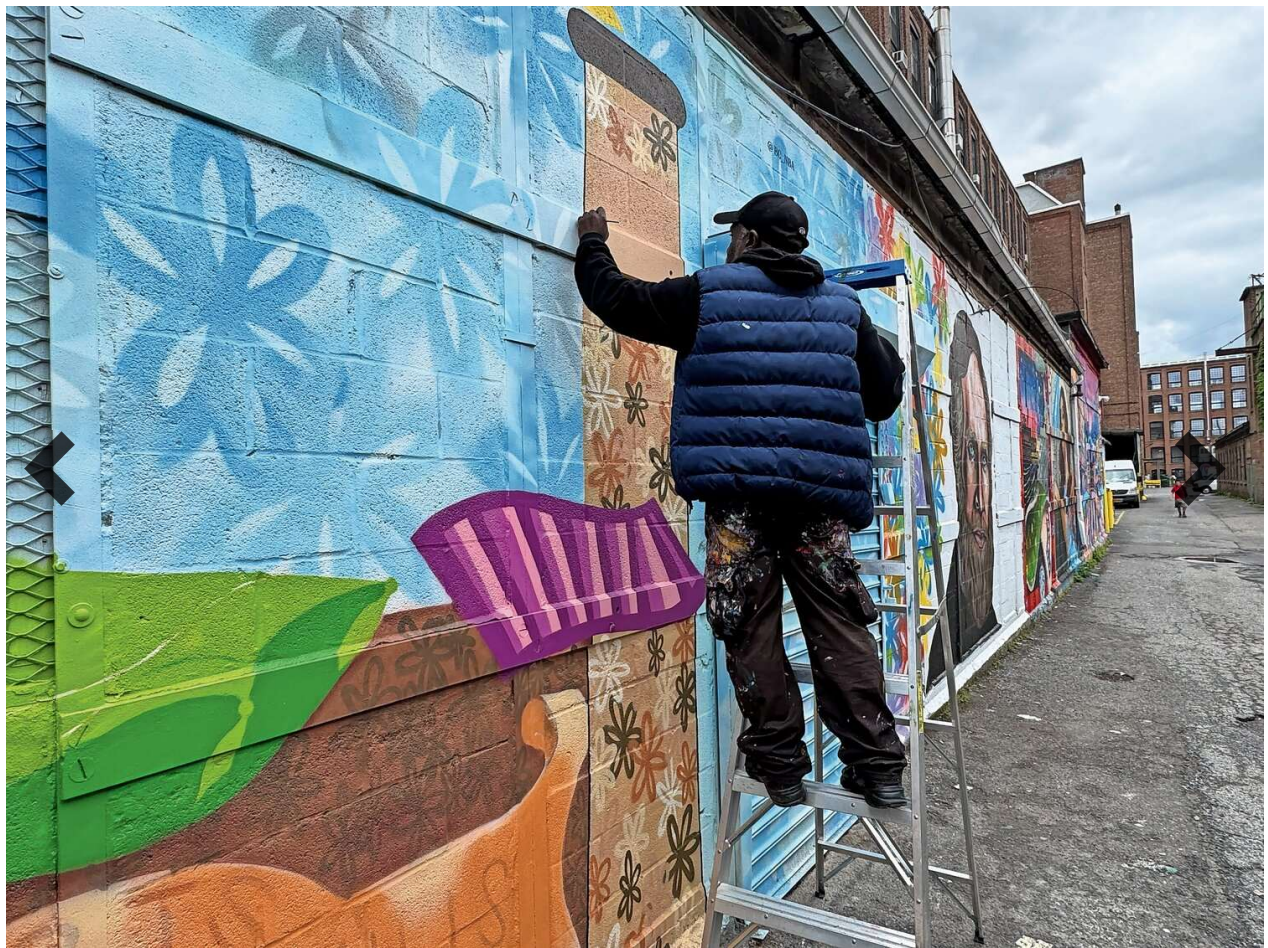
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## Graffiti roots inspire mural revival at historic Yonkers carpet mill

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**Evan Bishop collaborated with another artist on a mural of the factory's defunct smoke stack.**

Michelle Mullen photos



**by Michelle Mullen**

The concrete walls and blank warehouse facades of a 19th-century carpet mill in south Yonkers are home to a fresh collection of vibrant murals. A graffiti artist born and bred in Riverdale is behind the revival of this long-neglected site.

Leading the initiative to transform the outdoor space is Evan Bishop. Long before he spearheaded Yonkers Arts, the nonprofit behind the beautification project, he was a kid with cans of spray paint. At the time, graffitied trains still rumbled through the five boroughs.

“In the 80s, hip-hop exploded,” he said. “My friends [and I] all chose an element to represent. Some leaned towards DJing. Some did emceeing. We all tried our hands at break dancing. But graffiti always spoke to me. It was the voice of the people you couldn’t see, and that was exciting.”

A pivotal moment came when a young Bishop watched “Style Wars” for the first time — the groundbreaking 1983 documentary on New York City’s subway graffiti scene.

“My mind was blown,” he said. “[The artists] were my peers. They were teenagers. They were doing it on a canvas that traveled the city. And you know, the idea of eight-and-a-half by 11 was too small for my brain to even fathom.”

By day, Bishop was a varsity athlete. But after dark, he and his friends would sneak out to the train yards between 231st and 137th streets, tagging cars in a hurry before the police rolled through.

But on one fateful day, at 15, everything changed. The spray paint he had stashed in his bedroom disappeared. His mother was the culprit.

A single mom and retired CUNY professor of office administration, Bishop’s mother surprised him not with punishment, but with permission. The next day, she handed him a respirator and two box fans to protect against the toxic fumes.

“If you’re going to do this, do it right. Spray paint your room,” he recalled her saying.

From that day forward, he no longer had to hop the train. Or risk being fatally electrocuted on the third rail. Or fear crossing paths with rival crews.

“It was a revolutionary parental decision, and all her friends were saying ‘you’re crazy,’” Bishop said.

Today, Bishop is the executive director of Yonkers Arts, dedicated to supporting public art and leading large-scale beautification efforts in neglected urban spaces — but not without paying homage to the history behind the outdoor canvas.

On the facades of the carpet mill, one mural shows vivid depictions of the looms that once filled the factory floors. Another features Alexander Smith, founder of Alexander Smith and Sons Carpet Factory.

The murals are the latest phase of a decade-long effort by artists and community leaders to reclaim the former manufacturing site as a hub of culture and creativity. The buildings themselves serve as headquarters for a collective of artists called YOHO, a name chosen simply because ‘it sounded fun,’ according to Bishop. Inside the mill are floor after floor of converted art studios for YOHO creatives, including sculptors, quilters and woodworkers.

But Bishop says this is just the beginning. The on-site Yonkers Arts Gallery hosts a range of public programming and exhibitions, like the upcoming “Art of Food” show. This exhibit features paintings, sculptures and interactive installations that explore connections between art and sustenance through texture, stories, and creativity.

With plans already in the works for a host of new murals, Bishop said he hopes to put the Carpet Mill Arts District on the map as a local tourist destination.

## Keywords

Evan Bishop Yonkers, Yonkers Arts, Carpet Mill Arts District, Yonkers murals, public art Yonkers, YOHO artists, Yonkers graffiti, historic Yonkers factory

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Felix Lam has been the superintendent at 2465 Palisade Ave., in Spuyten Duyvil for 50 years. The 81-year-old has made his home — and career — at the eight-story co-op since he was a young man. And how does that make him feel? “I’m very happy about it,” Lam said.

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