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Inspired ARTISTS

Artistic expression comes in many forms — from the visual arts to theater to dance. The following local artists are forging creativity and inspiring the community.

TEXT BY
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ELIN BODIN

*Museum Cupola by Alison Wells
(from "Collage 02740" Series)
Paper Collage on board, 16"x12"*



Swinging from the Stars

Teresa Kochis

Mastering aerial arts requires a combination of technical precision, strength, flexibility and grace.

Teresa Kochis makes it look effortless.

Kochis, a New Bedford-based aerial artist, performs her high-flying acrobatic feats on 19-ft.-long silks that dangle from the ceiling of her home at The Ropeworks loft space for artists. She climbs, twists, spins, drops and contorts herself with the poise of a dancer.

“When I perform, I am very focused on executing the skills well and safely. After that, I let the spirit of the piece take over, whether that means deep diving into serious emotion, moving with abandon, or allowing my inner clown to take to the stage,” she says.

Kochis is owner of Overhead Arts, which provides circus arts training right in the heart of New Bedford. She first started offering a few classes for adults in January 2010, and soon extended lessons to youth.

In addition to classes at her loft, Kochis brings aerial arts to area youth through New Bedford Cultural Council-sponsored programs at the Boys and Girls Club of New Bedford and AHA! (Art • History • Architecture).

Over the years, she has watched her students reach new heights (both literally and figuratively) in confidence and ability.

“I have adult students who have gone on to acquire teacher-training certificates and now teach at Overhead Arts. I have advanced youth students who are seeking out educational and performance opportunities in circus arts. I have students that come back year after year to take part in Overhead Arts’ outreach programs. I’m so proud of all of them,” Kochis says.

In 2016, Kochis opened an additional space at 88 Hatch Street, not far from The Ropeworks. “The building is a great fit for Overhead Arts since it’s intended for artists, has industrial beams perfect for rigging aerial equipment, and lots of open floor space for classes.”

“The intrinsic value of circus arts has the power to bring joy, self-confidence, drive, and perpetual wonder to an individual,” she says.

As a child, Kochis immersed herself in drawing and painting. At age 17, she encountered aerial arts when her sister began training at the Circus Arts Institute in Atlanta.

“I remember seeing her perform and knowing I wanted to do be able to do that, too,” says Kochis, who went on to receive training and education from the Arts Institute, the New England Center for Circus Arts and New York University’s Gallatin School for Individualized Study. She also served as a coach coordinator and social circus instructor for the outreach program of Cirque du Soleil.

Kochis and her partner, Andy Anello, eventually moved from New York City to New Bedford with a little guidance from the Internet.

“I googled, ‘Massachusetts loft,’ and our building The Ropeworks Artist Condominium came up in my search. It just happened to be the week before New Bedford Open Studios, so it was easy to come down and take a look at the space. The rest is history,” she says.

Kochis credits her success with the supportive atmosphere of New Bedford, which offers affordable living and studio spaces, an array of arts organizations, proximity to larger cities like Boston and Providence, and a rich culture and history.

“I love the feeling of possibility that exists in New Bedford. Whether it’s a small business opening up or a nonprofit launching or a historic mill building being re-envisioned, New Bedford is a place where new ideas and projects are being tested,” she says.

In the meantime, Kochis hopes to grow the student base by attracting more talented and passionate coaches and launching out-of-school camps, and potentially, a scholarship program.

“Every time I teach a student to juggle scarves, I’m reminded of the intrinsic value of circus arts. It has the power to bring joy, self-confidence, drive, and perpetual wonder to an individual in a short instant, which can truly last a lifetime,” she says. 🦋



CERAMICS

Fire it Up Chris Gustin

A lover of forms, a master of his craft, renowned ceramics artist Chris Gustin builds both functional and sculptural pieces that push the limits of the imagination.

Like his creations, which can shape-shift depending on their position and lighting, Gustin can be viewed through many lenses: entrepreneur, professor and ceramics artist.

As a young man in California, Gustin took the reins of his family's ceramics factories—an enterprise first pursued by his grandfather. After taking courses in pottery making, he felt a calling to explore clay as an artisan more than a businessman. His brother, a painter, suggested that he enroll at Kansas City Art Institute.

"At that moment you could either go left or right, and that would be your direction for the next ten years," Gustin says.

From there, he crisscrossed the country, building his education and experience. After graduating from Kansas City Art, he earned graduate degrees at the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. He established a clay studio

Soon others began requesting his tiles for their homes, and the demand grew into a full-fledged business. One project of which he is most proud: the installation of 12,000 tiles at Bennington College in Vermont.

Working within teams of architects, builders and designers keeps him grounded, but his passion centers most on his artistic pieces—in particular, clay vessels, vases and teapots.

Gustin molds clay into abstract, biomorphic shapes that he finishes with a layer of glaze. He works on multiples pieces at a time, often over the span of years.

The process is "intuitive," he says. "I don't have the finished result in mind, but that's not to say I don't guide things. I'm trying to react to the moment," he says.

He wants his audience to experience his art in the moment as well. Gustin's vessels are built to the same scale as a human. "It's meant to be confrontational, not aggressive, a one-on-one encounter," he says.

The otherworldly shapes and colors of the ceramic art explode

The otherworldly shapes and colors of the ceramic art explode and recede depending on the light, and are meant to conjure memories, dreams and experiences.

in Connecticut, and eventually taught ceramics for a combined two decades at Parson's School of Design in New York, Boston University and Swain School of Design (which became part of UMass Dartmouth in 1988).

Now the artist and his wife reside in picturesque farm country on Horseneck Road in southern Dartmouth. His home abuts an 8,000 square-foot renovated chicken coop that now houses his studio and tile business.

Here, he balances his two endeavors—a thriving tile business and art gallery.

The company, Gustin Ceramics Tile Production, emerged "organically," Gustin says. When he and his wife began designing their home, Chris built and designed tiles for the kitchen, bathrooms and shower stalls. He harnessed techniques he had developed over the years, choosing high-fired clay for their durability and his own signature glazes.

and recede depending on the light, and are meant to conjure memories, dreams and experiences.

Aside from his art and business, Gustin is community-oriented. Through an internship program, aspiring ceramics artisans get up close to learn the processes behind his craft while gaining a sense of the realities of living life as an artist, he says.

Also, he is known around the South Coast for his public, biannual Anagama woodfiring events, which involve a 450-cubic-ft. kiln that can fire up to 1,000 pieces. And he volunteers with the Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust, which calls upon artists to create works synergistic to the landscape.

"Dartmouth is a pretty amazing place. There is an incredible array of creative people from all walks of life. There are writers, poets and musicians. There is a lot of support and appreciation for artists here," he says. 🍷

The Grace of Strong Women

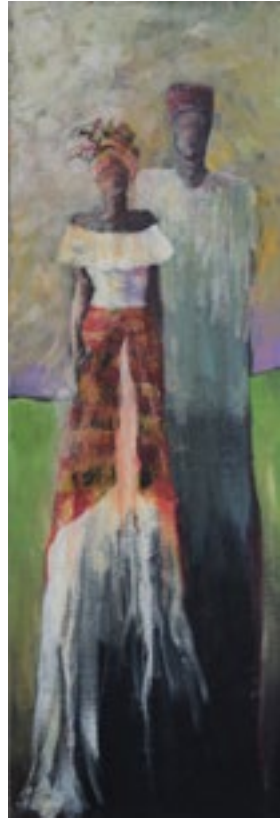
Alison Wells

Painter Alison Wells, a native of Trinidad, never imagined she'd end up in southern Massachusetts—or that she'd make her living as an artist. “Every time I made very certain decisions not to get into the arts, my life and universe just brought me back,” she says.

She studied architecture before a scholarship at the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts in Jamaica allowed her to do what she loves. She taught art for several years in Trinidad before venturing to New Bedford for graduate school.

Wells's paintings and collages explore urban landscapes, local history, femininity, and more. Her works appear in public, private and family collections around the world.

In her “Underground Railroad” series, which plays out on canvas and paper, she recreated New Bedford's history as a destination for escaped slaves, and Frederick Douglas's pivotal role in bringing them to



If everything is aligning at the same time, and things are working out, not conflicting, it can move faster.”

Sixteen years since moving to the region, Wells has settled into her downtown New Bedford studio. In addition, she volunteers at community organizations that promote historical preservation, and has taught painting to both teens and veterans. “The energy for the arts is growing in New Bedford,” she says. ♪

(Left) *Duet* (from “Totems” series), Acrylic on canvas, 36”x12”

(Below) *Festival Time*, (from “Totems” series), 20”x30”

“The women [in the Totem Women series] are strong, protective and stand their ground,” she says.

freedom. Her mixed media collages incorporate painting, photomontage and drawing techniques. Layered into the piece is text from original sources, such as clippings about a man who shipped himself in a box to escape servitude.

Wells's “Totem Women” series features Caribbean-inspired abstracted female forms that often morph into column-life structures. Traditional Trinidadian head ties adorn their heads.

“I'm from a family of independent women. I have four sisters, and I'm very close to my mother. The women [in the series] are strong, protective and stand their ground,” she says.

The production time of her art varies, she says. “It's all is in how it's flowing. It's in how the painting talks to you.





Through the Looking Glass

Tracy Silva Barbosa

As a child of Portuguese immigrants, painter and glass designer Tracy Silva Barbosa first encountered art in the works of the Catholic church.

“I was always drawn to the arts, but I did not have much exposure to museums,” she says.

Barbosa would peek at the pictures in her mother’s Bible, or notice stained glass in church in her native Taunton.

Barbosa considers herself foremost a glass artist, trained at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston and the Pilchuck Glass School in Washington.

But when she graduated, she no longer had the 2,000 lb. melting tank, kilns and other tools needed for glass art.

“That prompted me to paint on canvas, and I was able to produce the same effect. These were sketches for glasswork, but people liked the paintings,” she says.



than three years ago, has been treated with respect, she says. “I always had this theory, that if space is treated with a dignity and care that honors the person using it, that gets reciprocated. People will respect it.”

Barbosa also is involved with “artsadvocacy,” which means lobbying for government funding of the arts. Although the New Bedford area is not the same as living in New York City, she says as an artist she is appreciated here.

“People want me here, and they are good at showing it. I know the mayor on a first-name basis; I love that,” she says, adding that many economic development programs exist in town to help artists become self-sustaining entrepreneurs. ♪

(Left) *Three Wishes*, Etched, leafed, and painted layers of plate glass in an oak frame, 60” x 24” (Below) *Western Ocean I*, Acrylic paint, silver leaf, on canvas, 52” x 52”

She utilizes painterly strokes and photographic imagery in the plates of glass she layers together.

Her glass art contains both urban and flora elements, and is inspired by Asian landscape paintings and medieval relicology. She utilizes painterly strokes and photographic imagery in the plates of glass she layers together.

Her work “Three Wishes,” features a hazy New Bedford skyline, with etched and leafed glass plates layered in, exuding an organic feeling.

Before moving to New Bedford, she gained access to the tools she needed at UrbanGlass in Brooklyn and was involved in the New York City art scene.

Now, she does commissioned work for private collections or individuals—but also works on community projects. “Ever since I was in art school, public art is a goal of mine.”

Some public works include a large 35-foot mural in the Carney Academy Public School Greenhouse, and a bus shelter installation in Providence. The former, which was installed more



Color Girl

Alyn Carlson

New Bedford painter Alyn Carlson calls herself the “color girl.” And there is a very specific reason why.

The artist has a condition called synesthesia, a neurological phenomenon. “It’s a sensitivity to the senses that cross, so what happens is when I hear sounds, I see colors,” she says.

Her oil and watercolor paintings are abstract and rich in color. “Color really represents emotion to me. It’s about how I feel that impacts the layout of the painting,” she says.

Her paintings depict landscapes and the aqua line—including some inspired by long walks in Westport, where she once lived for 32 years. She calls these paintings “portraits,” explaining that “it’s a real conversation” between her and the natural world.



Alyn, who grew up in Warwick, R.I., adores the landscapes of far-flung places like Prince Edward Island and Maine. “I went to Maine every summer. I was close to my grandmother, who owned a farm. We’d be in a car and stop. There would be these long moments where we would sit and absorb the open land. It’s kind of like church, getting quiet and taking it all in.”

“There would be these long moments my grandmother and I would sit and absorb the open land.”



Before devoting time as a painter, she raised three children, worked in theater (as an artistic producer and actress) as well as for her father’s design company.

One day, encouraged by a friend, she began developing collages using Color-Aid paper—emotional portraits of different times of her life. “The dam broke. I couldn’t stop making paper collages,” she says.

Alyn started with watercolor but soon began working with oils, in particular poppy seed oils from France that lack chemical odors and require little clean up.

Now her home is the Ropeworks Building in the north end of New Bedford, which is an artist live/work facility. Her unit has seven-foot-high, energy-efficient, north-facing skylights, which provide natural lighting.

“I feel connection with the people, but also enjoy privacy, which is important for artists,” she says. 🙋





SPOKEN WORD

Rhyme for a Reason

Erik Andrade

Spoken word performance artist Erik Andrade, a master of verse, considers himself more a listener than writer.

He crafts words in the moment, inspired by a conversation, sudden idea, insight or coincidence. He listens for the universe's messages, and they envelop and flow through him, like a vessel, and emerge in the form of spoken word or poetry. It's often a spiritual, cathartic experience, he says.

"When it comes, it comes. Some of the favorite, most well-received pieces happened in the spur of the moment," he says.

Andrade's poem "I am a Thought" emerged in a span of minutes. He meditated on how our thoughts shape us, and become who we are. How what we put in ourselves—food, culture, art, even prejudices and hate—create us and unmake us. And he explored how we are all constantly evolving, and must pursue our authentic self amid a money-driven society.

His verse: "You must rearrange the you that is you; find the truths that are true; sometimes these thoughts are circling you;

At the core, Andrade is a humble, introspective person, who channels his own experiences of loss, grief and spiritual awakening into his art and activism.

Andrade experienced a string of tragedies at a young age. His mom committed suicide not long after an officer killed himself in the US Army National Guard barracks where they were stationed. Before he learned about his mom, he recalled saying that he did not respect the decision to end life. Those words came back to haunt him.

Andrade returned to Massachusetts to live with his grandfather, and suffered another loss when he passed away one month later. "It threw me for a loop...I went into a shell," he recalls.

A spiritual experience indelibly altered his life. Holed up in his room one night, still in a dark mental place, he heard two voices: One male, one female. One said, "It's not his time." He soon recognized them as the voices of his mother and grandfather; and finally left his room and ran until he couldn't stop. At the time, he was 19.

Andrade is a humble, introspective person, who channels his own experiences of loss, grief and spiritual awakening into his art and activism.

habitual thoughts of thoughts that inhabit the human brain; never remain chained to ideas that bring you pain; when what gives you joy will change; all things rearrange."

Andrade, a Cape Verdean and Irish American activist, social entrepreneur, fashion designer and overall Renaissance man, is a New Bedford artist who has garnered many accolades.

During the past two years, the New Bedford-based artist was recognized as a SouthCoast Emerging Leader Nominee (nominated by a local media group, the New Bedford chamber and others); won the New Bedford NAACP Civil Rights Trailblazer Award; performed at TedxNewBedford; partnered with The Marion Institute; organized a Black Friday community event; participated in a business accelerator program to expand his company, La Soul Renaissance, into a socially active clothing company; and more.

In December 2015, he won the title of Slam King 2016 at the Lizard Lounge, a spoken word, poetry and music venue in Cambridge. This opened up an opportunity to compete in the Individual World Poetry Slam, held in Flagstaff, Ariz., in October 2016.


"It awakened me to infinite possibility," he says.

Soon he refocused on school, and years later, quit the military, and joined the antiwar movement in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. At that point he'd lived throughout Rhode Island and Massachusetts, with a stint in Florida, before circling back to New Bedford.

A chance encounter with professor and jazz performer Andy McWain at UMass Dartmouth led to a collaboration on a series of spoken word events on campus.

Andrade formed La Sole Renaissance in 2002, a community of artists, and has taught hip-hop classes to New Bedford High School students.

He also has taught at-risk youth in group homes and lock-up facilities and some—years later—have approached him with thanks. "It was so rewarding to see them, now men, and some fathers," he says.

"An artist brings light into dark times," he says. "Art is definitely a seed that you can plant to create change." 



MUSICAL THEATER

Leading Lady

Allyson Duarte

As a six-year old, Allyson Duarte loved dancing around her bedroom, singing Grease hits “Summer Nights” and “Hopelessly Devoted.”

Little did the Westport resident know that many years later, she’d star as Sandy for the summer stage production at the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center.

“Playing Sandy was a dream,” says the 21-year-old actress. “It was my first time playing a leading lady in a professional piece. I was excited, but also nervous. It’s a lot of responsibility to lead a cast.”

Duarte is a junior at the prestigious Boston Conservancy, concentrating on musical theater, and has set her sights on pursuing big dreams on stage. But her art, and passion, stems from the support she has received growing up here.

“There is tremendous respect for all art forms in this area. Opportunities are all around for people of all ages to get creative and, most importantly, be exposed to different types of art,” she says.

As she got a little older, she worked with Star Players of Bristol County, a theatre company that recently closed its door, and took roles like Hodel in Fiddler on the Roof—and, ironically, Marty in Grease. More recently, she was part of the ensemble cast for Mary Poppins at the Z.

For the Z version of Grease, Duarte says she auditioned like everyone else, waiting in line and singing 32 bars of music for director Michael Susko. A few weeks later the producer offered her the role of Sandy Dumbrowski.

Duarte remarks that she is very similar to Sandy. “I am somewhat of a goody-goody. I naturally carry the sweet and naive essence of Sandy. But, I like to think I have a sassy side, too,” she says.

As an actress, she strives to portray characters as real human beings, not caricatures. She wanted to show Sandy in a more nuanced light, as she represents the struggle of many girls: knowing when to play by the rules, and when to have fun, she says.

Duarte says she auditioned like everyone else,
waiting in line and singing
32 bars of music for the director.

Long before Duarte took the lead role in Grease, the Z already was a second home. “I saw my first theatrical production, Cats, when I was young. I will always remember sitting in awe of the performers,” she says.

As a young child, Duarte took dancing lessons at Dancemakers in Fairhaven. She first performed in a musical in middle school: Amaryllis in the production of Music Man. She acted in some small-scale productions at Westport High, where she graduated in 2013, and fed her need for year-round theater at Fall River Little Theater.

“The people [at Fall River Little Theater] became my mentors. I jumped from show to show with them, from Liesl in The Sound of Music to Marcy Park in 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee to one of the Irish Kate’s in Titanic. I covered an array of roles and it started to define who I was as a performer,” she says.

“Michael Susko and I had a lot of conversations early on in rehearsals about finding moments where Sandy stood up for herself. Then the key is balancing those moments with the iconic ingénue everyone knows and loves,” she says.

Duarte credited Susko with making every actor on stage feel valuable. “Whether I was the 12th tap dancer in line or belting out my solo ‘Hopelessly Devoted,’ I was treated similarly, which was necessary for the progression of the musical. This was essential in Grease because we had such a small cast. Everyone needed to feel important.”

After graduation, Duarte plans to try her luck auditioning for parts in New York.

But she adds, “I do eventually want to come back to the South Coast. It’s not even a question. It’s my home... I am only 21 years old and I have a lot of things I want to do and places I would love to see. But in the end, the South Coast has my heart.” she says. ♪