



Spectrum Gallery: *Keeping It Fresh, Taking Risks, Giving a Sense of Community*

by RONA MANN
Photos by Jeffery S. Lilly

Spectrum. It has many definitions, perhaps chief among them, "a continuum of color."

And what comes to mind when you consider a continuum of color? Something fresh, bright, constantly changing. What a wonderful name then that Barbara Nair has chosen for her gallery and shop in Centerbrook: Spectrum Gallery, a place where there is a continuum of color, form, and style that is fresh, bright, and constantly changing.



Make no mistake...Nair did not come upon this by accident. This is a woman whose background is artistic, whose foreground is organization, and whose vision is right on target. As the Artistic Director of Arts Center Killingworth, Nair saw Spectrum as a natural extension of what she has been bringing to the shoreline,

river towns, and surrounding areas for the last 12 years.

Arts Center Killingworth is a non-profit arts organization that focuses on the development and presentation of the visual and performing arts by presenting programs that run the gamut from classes and intensives, to workshops, concerts, theatre events, and summer camps...and always in support of local amateur and professional artists.

Nair and her husband, Balan divide their time and talents between New York City and Connecticut. While Balan's sphere of influence centers in the technology arena, Barbara is a former actor and director who studied non-profit arts management and owned her own theatre company in Manhattan. Some years ago the couple came to Connecticut looking for a second home. They found their dream on 11 acres in Killingworth and shortly thereafter opened Arts Center Killingworth to showcase the talents and



aspirations of emerging, mid-career, and professional artists of all types.

With a focus on the visual arts, Arts Center Killingworth made its mark with the annual Madison Green Arts Festival and Open Art Studio Trail. They first showcased 17 artists and artisans with open studios, demonstrations, and exhibitions. In just 10 short years this event has grown to where it now boasts more than 100 fine artists and craftspeople, drawing attendees from all over New England...a true fixture in the fall scene on the shoreline.



Balan and Barbara Nair



Arts Center Killingworth also offers exciting and innovative events like Fashion Week I and II for young women with an interest in every aspect of design and fashion. From learning to draw to cutting patterns, sewing, and finally modeling their own creations, what a wonderful summer program this is for teenage girls. Younger children will delight in Nature Art Summer Camp where they learn to draw, paint, and sculpt utilizing the beauty of the outdoors. And always there are classes in jewelry design, botanical art, watercolor painting, drawing, photography, clay workshops, pressed flower workshops, mixed media, and anything and everything for the merely curious or more



serious artist. There's even a Get Messy Class for preschoolers allowing them to get "ooey and gooey" without reprimand. Just as the websites for the Arts Center and Spectrum Gallery are linked together, so are the gallery and the store. Although housed in one space, there is a definite distinction Barbara Nair likes to point out as you stroll throughout. The gallery is open and airy with excellent lighting and much thought put into the design of each installation. Nair is quick to acknowledge that Balan is in charge of hanging the art, which is no small



feat; but the Nairs are aided by the extraordinary addition of moveable walls. That unique feature allows them to change the space for every installation and to light it from different angles which keeps it fresh for frequent patrons who come for each new show.





Photos courtesy Spectrum Gallery



Barbara is constantly accepting the work of new artists; and while she says, "I hate the word 'juried,' she is also quick to add, "but we don't accept everything." In addition to water colors and oils, current visitors to Spectrum Gallery will view work using polymer clay, sea glass, semi precious gemstones, handblown glass, woven porcelain, and pressed flowers.

Just a few feet from the gallery space is the store; but it's a different world, yet still a world dictated by that continuum of color with ever-changing art and craft items, keeping it forever fresh. Here the curious will find gifts and decorative accessories in every price point from jewelry to fabric work, to children's ponchos, wall hangings, and things one never knew existed, but will be glad the artist created. The gallery flows into the store, and once you walk around this space, you'll find yourself right back in the gallery. Very smart, these Nairs!

It's a very special person who delights in bringing beautiful things to others. Who makes it her passion to teach artists to take risks and to offer them a glorious forum in which to take those risks. Spectrum Gallery provides an arena of local representation filled with light and color in which to represent who they are and what

they do, and to continue to seek out programs that will enrich, invigorate, and delight the diverse people of a community. Barbara Nair is that very special person. Together with Balan, who is not only a technology guru, but jack-of-all trades in the world of art, they are bringing passion and education to an area they have not only adopted as their second home, but one in which they are fully invested. They give back by giving the gift of the arts in every way they can: from the arts center, to the gallery, to the store. They do this not just because they love the visual and performing arts, but also the artists who create this work. And the place in which it is created and

shown. And most of all, the people for whom it is created and exhibited.

Art must be experienced in person to truly get a sense of its magnitude. Viewing artwork on the Internet is like looking from the outside in.



Being able to see how a piece of art is hung or displayed in relation to other works of art is all part of the gallery experience and should be savored. Some in the arts community have made what they do less real because they are relying solely on social media; and while social media has an important place in

marketing a gallery or an artist, it removes something very important from the art world equation: community. That's why what Barbara Nair and Balan have done with Arts Center Killingworth and Spectrum Gallery is so very important.



So here is your true social network...the warm bodies, the colors that pop, the subtle humor in how some of the installations are mounted and grouped. And always the freshness of something new. There are six exhibitions a year at Spectrum Gallery. Don't miss "Food: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" now on display through May 10th, followed by "Scientific Illustration & Fine Art," May 22-July 12th, and "Collage... It's an Adventure!" July 24th-September 13th.

Visit www.spectrumartgallery.org and see what's going on! Better yet, take a drive and lose yourself in the gallery and store at 61 Main Street, Centerbrook (860) 767-0742

Shop online when you have the time at Spectrum/Gallery Anytime www.spectrumgallery.org/shop

Arts Center Killingworth is located at 276 North Parker Hill Road, Killingworth www.artscenterkillingworth.org (860) 663-5593

