



ART

Kent Village Barn Shops Continues Rich Tradition Of World-Class Art in Kent

Kent, Connecticut has been known as a destination for art aficionados since local legend Jacques Kaplan opened his Paris-New York-Kent Gallery in a railroad station and caboose off Main Street more than two decades ago. His exhibitions drew art critics from around the world.

Today, the epicenter of Kent's art world is at the Kent Village Barn Shops, where Morrison Gallery and Ober Gallery reside amongst a half-dozen Peter Woytuk sculptures that dot the landscape. It is not unusual for more than a hundred people to flock to the tiny "village within a village" for an opening at one of the galleries.

The Morrison Gallery (www.themorrisongallery.com) moved into a spacious 70,000 square foot building in the enclave in October 2006. Owner Billy Morrison had been working out of a house nearby, with a framing business in his basement and small gallery on the first floor. When the large space became available, he approached James Preston, former Avon CEO and owner of the Kent Village Barn Shops, about moving into it.

"Billy has great taste and a great eye, so I gave him a break on rent to take some of the risk out of such a big expansion," Mr. Preston recalled. "I've never regretted it. The gallery was an overnight sensation and has been an incredible draw for the village. It's continuing a rich heritage of art in Kent."

"It's been amazing to see how people have responded to the new

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space," Mr. Morrison said. "The scale, the architecture, the openness and the natural light are perfect for showcasing the most monumental of paintings and sculptures. It recalls some of New York's most beautiful contemporary art galleries, yet maintains a sense of Kent's bucolic charm," he said.

"The new gallery has also allowed us to attract internationally known artists, as well as some well-known Connecticut artists who have never shown in the state," Mr. Morrison commented. Case in point is noted painter and sculptor Norman Sunshine, who did some of his earliest paintings in Litchfield County, but has only shown his work in New York, Los Angeles and other cities outside the state.

The gallery specializes in Contemporary art and represents more than 20 artists, including Hugh O'Donnell, Cleve Gray, Wolf Kahn and Peter Woytuk. Many of the works of Woytuk, who is known for his large cast bronze sculptures of crows and other animals, are displayed on the grounds. Three massive bronze bulls, for example, currently lounge on the lawn and literally cause cars to brake and do a u-turn to pull into the parking lot, according to Mr. Morrison.

Solo exhibits change monthly throughout the year at Morrison Gallery and each show opens with a festive gathering with hors d'oeuvres, wine and live jazz. High-end custom framing is also available on-site.

Ober Gallery Specializes in German and Russian Contemporary Art

A second fine art anchor at the Kent Village Barn Shops is Ober Gallery (www.obergallery.com), which opened in July 2007 and specializes in Contemporary art. Owner Rob Ober, a teacher at the nearby Kent School who grew up in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, had been looking for potential gallery space for nearly 10 years when a new building at Kent Village Barn Shops opened for leasing.

"My collection is very modern and cutting-edge and really needed a modern space to display it well. This building has almost a Bauhaus kind of feel and was really the perfect fit." Mr. Ober remarked.

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Ober Gallery specializes in New York Contemporary artists, German and Russian Contemporary art, and modern prints by Joseph Beuys, Sigmar Polke, A.R. Penck, Susan Rothenberg, and Cecily Brown. Particularly significant is its collection of Russian Non-Conformist art.

Sixteen gallery artists are represented in the permanent collections of the Guggenheim Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Russian Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Past shows include a show on Russian art that featured works by Kasimir Malevich and a show of German Contemporary art.

Kent Art Walk

Several other galleries are within easy walking distance of Kent Village Barn Shops. Among them are:

- **The Bahelier-Cardonsky Gallery** – Owners Violaine Bachelier and Darby Cardonsky are known for their themed group shows, including Connecticut and Contemporary masters such as Alexander Calder, Joy Brown and Kirill Doron.
- **Kent Art Association** – This gallery was founded in 1923 by nine well-established artists who knew each other when they lived in New York City before moving to Kent: Rex Brasher, Elliot Clark, Floyd Clymer, William Dryden, F. Luis Mora, George Laurence Nelson, Spence Nichols, Robert Nisbet and Frederick Waugh.
- **Heron American Craft Gallery** – The gallery represents more than 100 American craftsmen in a wide range of work from ceramics and blown glass to jewelers and fiber artists.
- **Gregory James Gallery** – This gallery features fine art paintings and sculpture by emerging and established American artists of the Northeast.

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