



OUTERLANDS GALLERY IN Vergennes showcases art done in a wide variety of styles and media. Independent photo/Trent Campbell

## Vergennes gallery blends new, old

Art world veterans return to New England roots to follow dream

By **ANDY KIRKALDY**  
**VERGENNES** — Not too long after artists and Vergennes residents Cat Cutitto and Ross Sheehan met in New York City, they

knew they wanted a space that would serve as a gallery and base of operations for her photography and his work in several artistic media.

Cutitto, 33, a New Hampshire native and Tulane University graduate, and Sheehan, 35, a Salisbury native, Syracuse University and 1996 Middlebury Union High

School graduate, didn't fulfill that goal in their first several years working in the art world together in New York this past decade.

Nor did the couple do so in 2008 in Reno, Nev. Nor did they set up shop during the two years they next spent in San Francisco before moving to Vergennes in 2011. Homes and potential gallery spaces were simply too costly in San Francisco, Cutitto said.

"It's so expensive out there. I really liked that city, but it seemed hard to think of that long term in terms of purchasing a home, things like that," Cutitto said. "And both our families are on the East Coast."

But the dream that began in the Big Apple still lived.

"It started in New York," Sheehan said. "We would walk by this guy's work space, and we started talking that wouldn't it be great if we had a joint space and had our stuff in front of a window so that it was on display all the time."

The 2011 move to Vergennes provided the answer. Not only did Cutitto and Sheehan find a home to buy, but they also discovered a battered, two-bedroom bungalow

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— Ross Sheehan

at 37 Green St., across from the Addison Northwest Supervisory Union office building.

The location and the price were right for the 19th-century home, and Sheehan and his father, Salisbury's Jack Sheehan, who operates a carpentry business, had the skills to renovate it.

"It was in kind of rough shape," Cutitto said.

"But it was just so cute. There was some opportunity with it ... They did a massive overhaul."

About a year-and-a-half later, on May 2, they opened the Outerlands Gallery, which offers their and others' work in a surprising number of media: oil,

pastel and ink paintings; sculpture in wood and metal; wooden jewelry, digital photography, furniture, "altered books," paper cut-outs, blacksmithing and prints.

Despite that variety and volume, the modest number of people who wandered through Outerlands during that advertised first weekend (a grand opening and reception is planned for May 25 from 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.) told the couple the space looked clean, bright and logical.

"They said, 'My first impression is that it is a really nice open space and you haven't cluttered it,'" Cutitto said. "We had some really good feedback."

The couple also tried to retain a bit of a homey feel while renovating. Sheehan said they wanted patrons to be able to envision living with the artwork.

"People can say, 'I've got two windows at home, and this will fit it,'" Sheehan said. "We wanted it to be ... cozy and still have some more abstract stuff in here, so people could know they can hang it in their home and it would look OK."

**FUSIONS**

Cutitto and Sheehan advertise Outerlands as a contemporary art gallery, but much of what they display is also practical — earrings, cutting boards, clothing hooks — or traditional, such as local artist Lee Beckwith's blacksmithing.

"We like the fusion of both," Sheehan said. "We have a lot of contemporary artwork, and we have a lot of traditional furniture and metalsmithing and what-not, too. I think we were interested in that fusion of putting those two ideas in the same space and seeing what happens. And I think people have had an interesting reaction to it. People have been really excited when they walk in. It might be a little different than other places."

The price points are very varied, including \$25 earrings as well as paintings for four figures.

"If you have maybe eight pieces

hanging in a gallery in Chelsea or Soho in New York, that works. All you need is eight pieces for maybe \$10,000 each," Sheehan said. "We just knew we couldn't do that here. We knew we had to have things, hopefully in a clean way, displayed here that people could walk around easily and maybe take a small piece, instead of having to spend or wanting to spend that amount of money. That's why we have such a range ... from \$10 up to \$7,000."

As well as Sheehan and Beckwith, other Outerlands artists have county roots: Jesse Emilio, Peter Jensen, Sheehan's father, and his brother, Sam Sheehan.

The couple said others — such as Seattle's James Allen, who alters books into three-dimensional cutouts, and New York City painter Michelle Bova and Todd Monaghan — have growing national reputations. (Samples of all their work are available at [outerlandsgallery.com](http://outerlandsgallery.com).)

"We're bringing a lot of national artists in from around the country into a small town, work that hasn't really been seen in the state," Sheehan said, adding, "They're well-known in other places, so it's interesting to see what people gravitate toward here."

### DOUBLE DUTY

The space will also serve to promote Cutitto and Sheehan's careers. Cutitto, who earned a master's degree in videography while they lived in San Francisco, said her work as a wedding photographer is going well. A table in the rear of Outerlands is devoted to promoting that part of her career.

Sheehan is working for his dad's carpentry business three-plus days a week, but is also making furniture, often with wood and metal elements, and welding. Outerlands will promote those sidelines.

"The services are really as much a part of it as the gallery itself," Cutitto said.

"That's one of the reasons we wanted to do this, too."

At any given time Sheehan might be painting with oils, watercolors or pastels on canvases, sculptures or fabrics; or he may be drawing, making prints, sculpting with metal, stone or wood or making "semi-functional and functional furniture."

"It's not like I get sick of or bored of a medium," he said. "I just maybe see something that triggers, 'Boy, I wish I could do that.'"

What was once a garage on their home is now a studio.

"I don't really need space because with a camera you can go anywhere. But he needs a lot of space," Cutitto said. "He could fit this space six times over with art he has in storage."

Some of those works could end up in a sculpture garden planned



NEW HAMPSHIRE NATIVE Cat Cutitto and Salisbury native Ross Sheehan, holding daughter Remy, opened Outerlands Gallery on Green Street in Vergennes on May 2 and plan a grand opening on May 25. Independent photo/Trent Campbell

for the backyard. Also planned are online sales, something that would take advantage of Sheehan's work for an art handling and shipping firm in New York and San Francisco.

In all, the couple is convinced that after several moves they have found the right state and community.

"I really love this state," Cutitto said. "It's really forward-thinking. It's a small state, but I think there are a lot of things going on here. There's a sense of community, and I personally feel like it is a good match."

And Vergennes has made them feel welcome. Cutitto said many residents have said they appreciate the property being renovated, Bar Antidote has agreed to host a show of Sheehan's work, other gallery operators have talked about cooperative ventures, and city officials have made their life easier.

"People have been really supportive," Cutitto said. "We've only lived here for two years, but it really does feel like we've lived here much longer. We feel really lucky we're in that kind of community and we have that kind of reaction."

Reporter Andy Kirkaldy may be reached at [andyk@addisonindependent.com](mailto:andyk@addisonindependent.com).

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