



On the road again: The Creativity Caravan leaves storefront



Maya Stein works on a craft with five-year-old Liam L. DEBORAH ANN TRIPOLDI/STAFF

Gashapon

Curated by Asha Ganpat

Featuring six local artists

The Creativity Caravan, 28 South Fullerton Ave. Through Dec. 22

thecreativitycaravan.com, 201-259-9801,

By GWEN OREL

orel@montclairlocal.news

When The Creativity Caravan opened at the beginning of 2017, people wondered, “Where’s the caravan?”

There really is a caravan, just not on Fullerton Avenue. The 1973 Hunter Compact is in the driveway of the Nutley home of co-founders and owners Maya Stein and Amy Tingle.

It was always a peripatetic business, bringing art to schools and libraries and other places, and traveling the country.

Until Stein and Tingle decided to open a brick-and-mortar store in Montclair.

During the past two years they've held workshops, art exhibitions, have participated in Free First Thursdays at the Montclair Art Museum and made a difference in the town.

But with their two-year lease coming to an end, the couple decided to close the doors of their building — but not their business. Montclairites will continue to see their work in pop-up spaces, and in other homes.

[READ: 'MY MOTHER'S KEEPER' AT THE CREATIVITY CARAVAN](#)

[READ: CULTURE IS EVERYWHERE; THE CREATIVITY CARAVAN HOSTS 'THE MUSEUM OF GOODBYE'](#)

At an open studio a few weeks ago, five small children worked on making miniature books. Miniature books are a hallmark of what The Creativity Caravan does. Earlier that day, they had had an offsite workshop, where they taught teachers how to make the books.

Allison Santos, of Montclair, had brought her two daughters, 6 and 8, to the workshop. She will be sorry to see it leave.

Miniature books were a project Stein and Tingle did over the summer a few years ago. “And we discovered that it was an activity anyone could do, and teach other people,” Stein said. “It doesn’t take very long to learn, and very quickly become an expert at it. It’s a nice blend of art and writing.”

When they opened their storefront gallery two years ago, they told Montclair Local that the space would allow them to have a deeper interaction with the community.

“It’s a gathering space, and that’s been amazing,” Tingle said. But it was also a lot.

“We bit off a ton. Energetically, we’re ready to go back to the idea of mobility, which is our founding principle,” she added. When her son graduates high school this year, it will be easier to travel. And the rent is hard.

“Part of our principle has always been to make things as low-cost or free as possible,” she said. “That makes it really hard in a town like Montclair, even in the state of New Jersey.”



ART AND IMAGERY

Along with miniature books, some people will always associate The Creativity Caravan with the [Dairy Air controversy](#): an open letter from Tingle on Facebook to the ice cream parlor on the corner of Bloomfield Avenue and Park Street, criticizing the company's logo of a cow with a "tramp stamp."

Her letter got national and even international attention.

"For me, it was about speaking out when I saw something that bothered me," Tingle said. She took the strong reaction to it as validation that she spoke out at the right time. "It was never about the human beings that were behind the ice cream shop. It was about the image that represented.

"I'm an incredibly visual person. That's how I learn. For me, that image didn't make sense."

Tingle said that people have given her inspiring feedback, saying that they purposely brought children to Dairy Air to have a conversation about the image and what it meant, and how she could make a change in her own life by speaking out.

Of course, there was a lot of trolling and negative reviews on Facebook and Yelp too, some from people who had obviously never been anywhere near the store.



Maya Stein, left, and Amy Tingle work on crafts with a group of children.
DEBORAH ANN TRIPOLDI/STAFF

FINAL SHOW

The final show of The Creativity Caravan in its South Fullerton space will be “Gashapon,” featuring the work of six female artists. The exhibition will run through Dec. 22.

“Gashapon” means a kind of vending machine that drops capsule toys. In a release, The Creativity Caravan writes: “Do you inspect long before hatching the art from its habitat? In hand it is a charm, a relic, a talisman, a little thing of power to behold, and now it is yours, yours, yours alone!”

The literary and poetic description of art as something transformative and philosophical is typical of The Creativity Caravan. On its website, thecreativitycaravan.com, they define their mission as one that can “change lives by building self-confidence, harnessing imagination, helping to practice problem-solving, and bridging differences.”

Tingle’s letter to Dairy Air did that, for some. And it even led to making art: last January, Tingle created paper snowflakes with the names and/or identifying details of sexual assault victims. She made the snowflakes out of the thin, white paper used in rape kits and on exam tables.

OPEN ROAD

For Stein, the word Caravan suggests a traveling circus, something where a whole group of people travel together.

“In our vision for our business, moving forward, is to really keep gathering people with us and traveling and bringing programs in other places. There are no templates for this, so we’re inventing this as we go. It’s the idea of growing community by meeting people where they are, as opposed to forcing them to come to a static location.”

While it’s a little bittersweet to pull up roots, ultimately it was not a hard decision, she said.

Keeping the space fresh, and making sure the work was diversified, meant a lot of administrative work. “In some ways, the original vision of the business is diluting in ways that we want to be careful of.”

The two women are planning a large-scale traveling project, which they hope will start next fall. These sorts of projects take a year or so to plan, she said. They are hoping to get some other mobile businesses involved as well. “I mentioned the traveling circus,” Stein said with a smile.

“The natural trajectory of our work is to keep moving.”