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Notes from editor (not for publication):

I really liked this piece. I moved a chunk closer to the top because I think that it's hard to visualize where Melany's story is heading if you're not already somewhat familiar with the event. I hope I added this context without ruining the flow.

Line 158: Should it be Liz Chalfin? I couldn't readily find a Liz Sheldon but found Chalfin in the M-G artists. Other names to note: Steve Procter, Christie Herbert.

You landed the ending. Best ending of an arts piece I've seen in a long time. Very satisfying.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

Getting small in a big way

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

Area artisans embrace the magic of Brattleboro's first

Festival of Miniatures

####END SUBHED####

TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

Those who grew up as baby boomers might remember

"think big" as a phrase that seemed to guide the pursuits of a

7 whole generation. It was the handle for an economic strategy, it
8 added too many floors to skyscraper design, it was the moniker of
9 a favored racehorse, it was even the title of a book by Donald
10 Trump.

11 Bigger is better? Hmm. Some might say that's where
12 we've derailed.

13 This season, you can find an antidote in the Brattleboro
14 Festival of Miniatures, an idea sparked by a life-long collector of
15 small things: Melany Kahn of West Brattleboro and West
16 Chesterfield, New Hampshire.

17 Billed as "a free town-wide celebration of small scenes
18 with big imagination" in festival promotion, it's been touted
19 widely as townspeople and visitors alike are welcomed to
20 "discover more than [87] store windows brimming with magical
21 miniature scenes, darling doll houses, tiny terrariums, and
22 steaming model trains."

23 Exhibits are as varied as the storefronts they grace.

24 One display is a miniature structure rescued from the
25 Chesterfield dump; 14 were made at HatchSpace to customized
26 by students at each area school. Some displays come from attics,
27 others from barns.

28 At Retreat Farm is a cluster of gingerbread barns — a
29 miniature farm. Restaurants are offering tiny menus, the New
30 England Youth Theatre's holiday show is *Little Women*, and
31 Brooks Memorial Library has posted a "Miniature Masterpiece"
32 flash fiction competition.

33 Countless artists are represented through venues up and
34 down Main Street; onto Flat, Elliot, and High Streets; along
35 Putney Road and Western Avenue, and as far as the Winston
36 Prouty campus.

37 'Dollhouse therapy'

38 Kahn inherited the family farm in West Brattleboro from
39 her parents, acclaimed contemporary artists Emily Mason and

40 Wolf Kahn. Its pastures are still grazed, and its ambience is
41 evocative of a far-less-complicated time.

42 While Kahn's parents were painters, her penchant since
43 childhood has been for 3D for miniatures. Following her parents'
44 deaths — her mother's in 2019 and her father's in 2020 — Kahn
45 established the cluster of fields and buildings known as Stark
46 Farm as an arts retreat of sorts, one where inspiration is palpable
47 as one looks uphill from the farmhouse to see Mason's studio,
48 then down a steep slope to Kahn's.

49 "It was kind of a mess when I inherited [it] five years ago,
50 so we cleaned it up, and I brought my childhood dollhouse up
51 here," Kahn told *The Commons*. "My friends and I created
52 something called Dollhouse Clubhouse — where we came to
53 work on it together, to craft it, and just have fun."

54 Kahn never outgrew her love of miniatures, so she
55 welcomes the camaraderie.

56 "Just a bunch of us get together," she said. "There's a lot
57 of laughter, a lot of just silliness."

58 Zeroing in on every detail, from wallpaper to copper
59 flashing to parquet flooring, she notes how the enthusiasts just
60 dial in on fantasy.

61 "There're no real problems at Dollhouse Clubhouse:
62 They're all fake problems [and] your troubles sort of melt away.
63 It's like therapy."

64 Dollhouse therapy.

65 Kahn had recently been resurrecting her own miniatures
66 collections when her niece's family dollhouse wended its way
67 through the family tree and ended up with her.

68 "We went nuts on this one," she recalled. "Then we
69 started making jokes about, 'Oh, the viewers will love this.' And
70 then we said, 'Well, you know, we don't actually have viewers.'"

71 Then, last March, Kahn had a big idea — a miniatures
72 festival.

73 She approached Kate Trzaskos, executive director of the
74 Downtown Brattleboro Alliance (DBA), late last spring and soon

75 she and DBA's creative director, Erin Scaggs, became, as Kahn
76 puts it, "the engine behind the whole project."

77 Kahn credits that team for the Festival's anticipated
78 success and for so much more of Brattleboro's recent cultural
79 advancement.

80 She started networking and found herself amidst people
81 who were pretty thrilled with the idea.

82 "It started to take shape as dozens of artists and business
83 owners jumped on board," she said, and each was struck, it's
84 said, with a sense of nostalgia: "a desire to bring out the old train
85 set or the little miniature teacup set that they got from their
86 grandmother."

87 The festival involves "basically, every business downtown
88 plus empty storefronts," Trzaskos explained. "We're really making
89 a splash, filling it top to bottom." When business owners were
90 introduced to the idea, "you could just see the little light bulbs
91 start clicking on," she said.

92 Each venue has had almost complete freedom to create
93 its own display.

94 "It's about taking the inspiration of this and applying it to
95 your business," said Trzaskos. "The products you sell, what you're
96 all about."

97 One store is doing a display of fashion dolls, and "we've
98 got people bringing in their childhood train sets. We've got little
99 log cabins," she said.

100 "It's meant to be an invitation from the window into the
101 shop, and that enhances what they're doing [inside]," Trzaskos
102 added.

103 An artsy dollhouse filled with 104 tiny art

105 Kahn had stopped on a walk one day to share "a really
106 big idea having to do with a very large dollhouse" with her

107 neighbor, Petey Mitchell, co-proprietor of Brattleboro's Mitchell-
108 Giddings Fine Arts (MGFA).

109 Kahn asked if she'd be interested in the gallery being the
110 focal point — the place to display the family Victorian dollhouse
111 that started the event.

112 Mitchell was all in.

113 As the project was taking shape, she saw how many
114 artists could be featured and its potential for a collaborative effort
115 among businesspeople in town.

116 "It's turned into an incredible community event,"
117 Mitchell said.

118 She uses the word "delight" to describe the contagious
119 spirit it's generated. "So many people are uplifted by this whole
120 project," she said. "It's just really exciting to see how many
121 people are involved."

122 Anticipating the town-wide event will be a boon to
123 business, Mitchell adds, "it's a really good learning curve
124 showing how people can work together creatively [...]. I think
125 people were just ripe for doing something uplifting — different
126 from what we're all reading and feeling."

127 Now, in that refurbished 3-foot-tall Victorian doll house
128 in the window of MGFA, at 181-183 Main St., one can eye many
129 pieces from Kahn's collecting distributed in nine rooms and on
130 exterior surfaces and stairwells.

131 Pointing to a tiny flour sifter — that works — Kahn then
132 showed "an old toaster that belonged to my grandmother, pieces
133 that were part of my upbringing and childhood, and some newer
134 pieces that have come along."

135 Kahn's criteria? "If it makes me laugh, then I put it in my
136 dollhouse." If it's quirky or if it has an old vibe? Even better.

137 The rest is filled with original works of 110 artisans — a
138 collection of pottery, paintings, blown glass, woven rugs, stitched
139 quilts, miniature baskets, furniture, clothing, accessories — "all
140 lovingly local."

141 There's no set concept, theme, or time period for the
142 centerpiece collection at MGFA. "I gave artists completely free
143 [rein] to do whatever they wanted," says Kahn, noting the
144 different floors in each room and the variety of wallpapers
145 throughout.

146 One spies a teeny Deidre Scherer thread-on-fabric work,
147 mini overalls by Sandy Klein, a rug by Kris McDermet, a George
148 Sawyer bench, a Sandglass Theater creation, a Steven Meyer
149 teddy bear.

150 There are works by Natalie Blake, Charlie Hunter, Andy
151 Yoder, Lily Lyons, Steve Procter, T. Breeze Verdant, Christie
152 Herbert, Laura Zindel — the list goes on.

153 In total, it's a stunning collection, a big labor of love, and
154 a vivid testimony to the richness of the area arts scene.

155 To complement the miniatures festival, MGFA has
156 mounted a Small Works show, including art of Matt Brown,
157 Deidre Scherer, Paul Bowen, Liz Chalfin, Willa Cox, Chuck
158 Olson, among several others. Its opening — and the Festival—
159 will be celebrated at Gallery Walk on Friday, Dec. 5 from 5 to 9
160 p.m.

161 **A museum of tiny things**

162 In the Latchis Gallery at 50 Main St., local theater artist
163 Dory Hamm will return to the space he once knew well as an
164 early player with NEYT, which operated from the storefront. This
165 time, he'll be there with his Museum of Things Tiny and Found.

166 When Kahn got wind of Hamm's love of miniatures and
167 his esoteric home collection, she urged his going public to create
168 the Museum — a collection of tiny stages, scenes, and many
169 printers trays filled with an eclectic collection of ephemera to
170 which over 15 area artists have contributed.

171 Pointing to a teeny figurine in a tray cubby which was
172 given to him when he was 2 years old, Hamm professes a lifelong
173 love of miniatures, particularly for the stories they hold.

174 “I think there’s something inherently human about the
175 loving of and collecting of small things: There’s a story in every
176 small thing,” Hamm said.

177 Recalling his own experience with stories that drew him
178 to the stage, he added, “You’d be hard pressed to find someone
179 that did not have something small in their life [that matters. It]
180 could be jewelry, a little photo, a seashell, a rock, a piece of
181 glass, some just little keepsake.” Tangible and controllable, small
182 things create a fondness that’s universal and ubiquitous.

183 Of the pull between large and small scale, Hamm
184 observed that “there’s something inherently happy about tiny
185 things, but I think we’re obsessed with the two opposites, like the
186 very big also brings us awe, and then very small — it really pulls
187 us in.”

188 Observing that we “live in a very heady, scary time,”
189 Hamm pointed out that seeing a world in miniature “brings us
190 out of our heads. There’s something inherently grounding and
191 meditative about tiny things.”

192 Offering a miniature business card, Hamm said the
193 Museum will be open Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings
194 and all day Saturday and Sunday with mini-tours, a scavenger
195 hunt, and other interactive activities.

196 The Festival’s executive producer, Nancy Vitale, has been
197 key in coordinating all the moving parts working with Kahn, the
198 creators, the DBA, and all community partners.

199 A day before opening, Vitale said she and Kahn were
200 taking a walk around to see if some windows need “a little extra
201 love” — or one of Kahn’s “extraordinary scenes.”

202 Kahn reported that she spotted a family at one of the
203 windows admiring the scene in detail. As it turned out, they came
204 from a small town north of Springfield, Vermont, and they had
205 come specifically for the Festival and then for a meal in town.

206 Such, said Kahn, is what has been the hope: a boon to
207 Brattleboro.

208 A full schedule of related events coordinated by DBA
209 (see [sidebar](#)) includes puppet shows, tea parties, mini baking
210 contests, and more.

211 Visit brattleboro.com/ministroll for information.

212 And think small.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

214

0

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215

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216

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217

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