



Old Main Gallery & Framing features a wide variety of mediums on display in its downtown Bozeman space, including blown glass by Austin Fields (top left), felted wool from Meghan Purcell (top right), and bronze sculpture from Stephanie Revennaugh (bottom).



REFRAMING COMMUNITY

Old Main Gallery & Framing continues its artistic legacy in downtown Bozeman

Written by Brian Hurlbut
Photos Courtesy of Old Main Gallery & Framing

WHETHER YOU'VE BEEN in Bozeman for a few days or several decades, there's a pretty good chance you've noticed Old Main Gallery & Framing while walking around downtown. Situated on East Main Street, between Black and Bozeman avenues in a quaint two-story brick building, Old Main has been downtown since it opened in 1964, making it one of the oldest art galleries in town and an important fixture in Bozeman's historic downtown district.

While much has changed in Bozeman over the years, the gallery and framing shop has remained true to its original purpose of supporting local and regional artists while providing custom framing solutions for all types of projects. "I feel that Old Main is probably stronger than it has ever been," says Lindsey McCann, who has owned the gallery with her husband, Micah Jastram, since 2020. "The caliber of things we are doing has really skyrocketed."

Though neither had even visited before, McCann and Jastram decided to move to Bozeman on a whim in 2013, when they were looking for a change from their hometown of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. McCann attended school for fine art photography, so before arriving in Bozeman she started calling local galleries looking for work. A conversation with the former Old Main owners, Jim and Lynda Brown, first led to a weekend visit and then a job offer in the framing department. She accepted and moved to Bozeman. Jastram joined her a few months later, also taking a job at the gallery.

"We fell in love with Bozeman," McCann recalls.

The Browns retired and sold the gallery in 2016 to a part-time Bozeman resident. McCann and Jastram wanted to buy it then, but the timing wasn't right. Within a few years, however, the new owner was ready to sell, and the couple felt ready to take it over, which they did in February 2020. Shortly after, the entire world shut down because of the pandemic.

"We closed on the business on February 1 and had to close the doors on March 15," McCann says. "It was just a complete whirlwind."

Forced to let all the employees go, McCann and Jastram ran the entire business alone for a year and a half. Because they had just taken over as owners and didn't have much of an employment history, they were ineligible for much of the emergency government funding.

"It was a really trying time," McCann admits.

Although selling artwork can have its ups and downs, the busy framing business helps keep the gallery going. McCann estimates it makes up about 65 percent of the overall business and credits her frame-shop employees for taking on projects most places won't even consider. Though framing was previously done in the basement of the gallery, it was moved to an off-site location that now houses five employees to keep up with the work.

"Our team is amazing," says McCann. "I'm so proud to work beside all of them, because they build some really beautiful things. The gallery is a labor of love and passion, but without framing, I would be terrified to own an art gallery."

In addition to serving customers who walk into the shop, Old Main also designs remotely. A client will ship art to the gallery, and then the frame shop will work with the client to get a feel for the aesthetics of their home, send options via email, and complete the project.



Lindsey McCann has owned the gallery with her husband, Micah Jastram, since 2020, but she started working in the framing shop more than a dozen years ago. McCann says her relationships with the artists are the most important part of owning the gallery.







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Bozeman artist Jennifer Pulchinski's barbed-wire sculpture on display in the gallery gains new intrigue up close. • Morgan Irons' evocative figurative paintings demand immediate attention from visitors entering Old Main Gallery. • Vermont photographer Jim Westphalen's striking images provide an enticing backdrop for Old Main's brick-and-wood interiors.

With the frame shop remaining busy, McCann can focus on building and maintaining her relationships with artists, something she considers the best and most important part of operating a gallery. "I take the relationships with these artists very seriously," she says. "They're like my family."

McCann was introduced to Bozeman figurative artist Morgan Irons a decade ago through a framing client and immediately fell in love with her stunning, evocative work. Since 2018, Irons has had several solo exhibits at Old Main, as well as galleries in New York City, Los Angeles, and Sante Fe. She is also a two-time recipient of the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant for emerging figurative painters.

"Old Main took me on as a young artist, which is always a risk for a gallery," says Irons. "They have always trusted my vision, given me freedom to create, and been willing to help me with whatever I've needed to build this career. This is a rarity in the gallery world."

Irons is especially grateful for the five solo exhibitions she has had in the gallery, which she credits as being instrumental to her growth as an artist. "Old Main is a community hub and place for the love of creativity," she says. "They prioritize artist relationships, creative expression, and giving each artist space to explore. Walking in feels like family."

This family-like atmosphere is something the gallery strives to create. For McCann, it's often more about the person than the artwork, and the story the artist is telling. "When art is being created for the person who is creating it, that resonates more with our buyers," says McCann.

McCann says her client base includes everyone from longtime locals who just want a small piece for their condo to part-time homeowners who want to curate artwork for their entire house. Something she notices, however, is that most clients have the same goal. "They are not coming here to try and find something that matches a sofa," she says. "They want something they have a visceral reaction to because it speaks to them. It's more about the story and the authenticity."

Like much of downtown Bozeman these days, change is on the horizon for Old Main, as the gallery will be moving to another location later this spring after the current building's owner decided on a new use for the space. While McCann says coming to terms with the move has been challenging, she is confident that Old Main will remain a major player in the local art scene.

"I was really mourning a loss there for a while, because I have spent more time here than in my home," says McCann, noting that the gallery has been in the same storefront for nearly 30 years. "I love downtown and I want to stay downtown. I have a lot of emotions about it."

The new location will still be downtown, just one block off Main on South Tracy Avenue. McCann looked at other spaces directly on Main Street, but the rent was too high. The owners of the new space have worked with the gallery on some tenant improvements and are keeping the rent reasonable. Most of all, they are excited to have the gallery in the space.

"We're invested in this community and Old Main," McCann says. "We're just a stepping stone for this business, and I want it to live way longer than me."

When they realized the gallery had to move, McCann and Jastram debated how to move forward. They even considered closing the gallery and just operating a frame shop. But, in the end, the artist relationships they had spent years building were just too important to give up.

"These people are here because of each other, not the space," McCann says. "The idea of not having that camaraderie and community; I can't give that up."

***Brian Hurbut** is the author of* Insiders' Guide to Yellowstone and Grand Teton *(Globe Pequot) and* Montana: Skiing the Last Best Place *(Great Wide Open), and his writing appears regularly in regional publications. He lives in Big Sky where he enjoys the trails, mountains, rivers, and roads.*