

Vicki Bolen, the artist behind a Mountain Road gallery and popular soup bowl fundraiser, is dead at 66



Bolen, pictured here in front of the Little Bird de Papel gallery (Mountain and Twelfth), which featured an outdoor mural to match the name.

Vicki Bolen, the proprietor of the Little Bird de Papel gallery at Mountain and Twelfth and the organizer of a major recurring fundraiser for OFFCenter Community Arts Project, died on February 6 in Albuquerque. She was 66. Richard Wolfson, her partner of 16 years, confirmed the death and said the cause was cancer.

Victoria Joy Bolen was born on May 30, 1956 in Sacramento, California and grew up on her family's rice farm in the nearby city of Carmichael. After graduating from California State University (Sacramento), she worked for Cost Plus World Market, becoming a manager who the company deployed to a number of locations both in California and Washington state.

Bolen later moved to Galveston, Texas, where for six years she ran a Pilates studio and an art gallery focused on the work of others. She moved to Albuquerque in 2000 to pursue her own art career and for several years managed that business out of her house before opening Little Bird de Papel in 2012.

Bolen's career flourished in Albuquerque, where her work ranged from pottery to bookbinding to printmaking and origami. Her enduring fascination with origami cranes was a source of inspiration for the gallery's name. So far as Wolfson can tell, she is the only artist in the world to make them not just out of paper but out of Tyvek-brand house wrapping material - the better for the birds to roll with the punches of outdoor weather.

Birds have also featured prominently on the Mountain gallery's exterior: Bolen commissioned muralist Andrew Fearnside to create a kind of colorful wall-sized field guide to local avian life, a project that wrapped up in 2020 ([DAN, 10/7/20](#)).

Bolen's art has been included or exclusively featured in [a number of exhibitions](#), including ones located at Mariposa Gallery (Nob Hill), Artichoke Cafe, the Albuquerque Country Club, and Mountain Road neighbor The Next Best Thing to Being There. Internationally, her work is in the permanent collections of museums in Buenos Aires, Mexico City, and at Wolverhampton College in the United Kingdom.

For a few years before the pandemic, Bolen also organized an annual fundraiser for OffCenter Community Arts Project called "Soup is Love," which involved shepherding area residents through the process of creating hundreds of ceramic bowls. The creations would then be fired in her kiln and auctioned off to benefit the arts center, which is on Park Avenue just west of the Central-and-Eighth roundabout.

"She had an amazing impact on whatever community she went to," Wolfson said.

Bolen and Wolfson would sometimes travel to as many as 20 weekend art shows per year, but in their spare time the couple liked to take in local theater, and their favorite company was the now-defunct Tricklock, based at Second and Gold. The couple would also attend frequent open mic comedy nights at which Wolfson performed. During summers, they made a tradition out of attending Santa Fe Opera shows for five evenings in a row, something they called an "op-cation."

Little Bird will continue as an arts studio and will also host small theatrical productions, Wolfson said.

Bolen is survived by her mother, Margaret Bolen, and brothers Butch and Steve Bolen. She was preceded in death by her father, Elmer Bolen.

A memorial is planned for this spring and details will be posted on [the Little Bird de Papel Facebook page](#).