

Bottlebrush Gallery & Center for the Arts presents:

artist of the month:

**January Feature: Debra and James Tobin**



**Ambridge, PA**

**Medium: Multi-Media, Photography, Digital Art, Painting, Drawing**



*Husband-and-wife artists Debra Zuzindlak Tobin and James Tobin bring a vibrant range of creative vision to Tobin Studios, based in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, with a satellite gallery located in Studio 5 at the Aluminum City Arts Building in New Kensington. Together, they form a dynamic artistic partnership rooted in curiosity, color, and a shared commitment to regional arts communities.*

## **Where do you find your inspiration?**

**D:** My inspiration usually comes from nature. Colors, textures, shadow and light along with shimmering metallics, natural fibers and minerals and are often incorporated into my multidisciplinary bodies of work. These include

paintings and drawings, fiber arts, printmaking, photography, jewelry and sculpture.

**J:** I'm always looking for inspiration from everyday things and places. A sunrise, a junked car on the side of the road, places I've been or want to visit.



**Tell us about your journey with Tobin Studios. When did you establish this space? What has been your favorite part of the studio so far?**

**J:** We started Tobin Studios in 2003. I kept seeing an empty store for rent in our town and thought it would be cool to have art there and use it as a creative space, with music lessons to help with the rent. 23 years later, we're still moving forward. Our favorite part is seeing former clients involved in music and art all these years later. It's magic when you see that creative spark kick in.

**You mention that "artistic dialogue" is important to your dynamic team. Are there any pieces in particular that complement each other?**

**D:** We have found encouraging artistic dialogue helps creative communities grow by turning individual practice into a shared exchange of ideas. Open

conversation exposes artists to new perspectives, techniques, and ways of thinking, helping them break creative ruts and take risks. Constructive feedback strengthens skills and confidence, while ongoing dialogue builds trust, making collaboration more natural and effective. By fostering connection, inclusion, and cross-disciplinary exchange, artistic dialogue transforms individual growth into collective creativity and a stronger, more vibrant arts community.



## **How does the act of creating change when working alongside another artist?**

**D:** Collaboration helps artists move beyond working in isolation and opens doors to innovation. It can break creative ruts, introduce new materials, techniques, or concepts, and encourage risk-taking and experimentation.

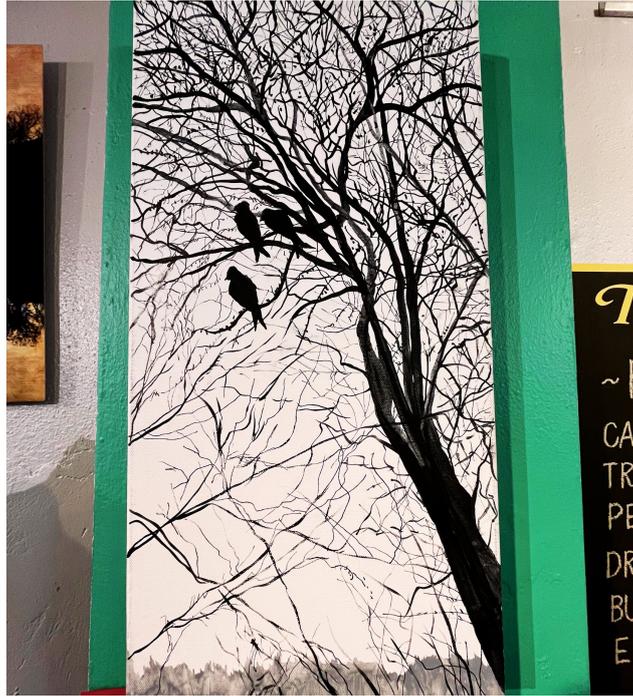
**J:** I think we compliment each other's work, sharing ideas & concepts & encouraging each other & other artists in the process.

## **What advice would you give to your younger artist self?**

**J:** Start taking it seriously sooner. Accept that you are an artist and create with that freedom vs getting caught up in things that keep you from creating.

**D:** I would advise my younger self not to become confined by instructors or conventions that suggest there is only one correct way to work within a

medium. Embrace experimentation, allow yourself to break rules, and remain open to discovery.



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Rather than feeling pressure to define a single artistic voice, recognize that it is natural—and valuable—to have multiple creative voices that can evolve into distinct bodies of work over time.

— Debra Tobin

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