

June 10, 2025

[Subscribe to the newsletter \(it's free!\)](#)[Visit the new "Our Events" page
\(/ourevents/\)](#)<https://ashland.news>[Support Ashland.news
\(/donation/\)](#)[Sponsor Ashland.news
\(/sponsorship-guidelines/\)](#)

Menu

[Go to > Home \(https://ashland.news/\)](#) » [Culture \(https://ashland.news/culture/\)](#) » [Art \(https://ashland.news/culture/art/\)](#) » **Her new gallery is a work of art in itself**

Her new gallery is a work of art in itself



The antique wood counter was the first item Karina Mendoza-Wittke bought to furnish her gallery. Art on First is at 20 S. Main St. in Ashland. Ashland.news photo by Bob Palermini

September 2, 2024

Art on First may be artist Karina Mendoza-Wittke's masterpiece

By Lucie K. Scheuer for Ashland.news

Karina Mendoza-Wittke meets me at the entrance to her new gallery in Ashland, Art on First, at 20 S. First St. across from the Ashland Springs Hotel, like a child who can't wait to show off her treasures to a favorite aunt.

The enthusiasm she brings to this space is catching. Mendoza-Wittke says the seed for this gallery, filled with local, primitive, nature-themed, Central American and Mexican Riviera-inspired art, has been growing within her heart and mind for over 30 years.

"When this beautiful building appeared as an opportunity, it would be the first step in a five-year plan," she says. "I didn't know until the end of November 2023 that the tenant was leaving, so I listened to the signs of the universe, and went all in with the idea of opening in 2024."

Her own contractor

Mendoza-Wittke says she became the contractor for the renovations. Most of the work on the building was completed in six weeks. The result is an imposing, azure, blue building, with wide awnings, circle bay windows, with the gallery on the first floor.

If you can reserve a bit of wonder from a time in your life when everything felt new, or a time when fine art was unfolding before you in broad strokes, then you will feel this in Art on First. It is full of light with nature photographs and prints by Tim Hallam and Daniel Elster, calling to us, reminding us we must preserve life, respect nature and protect the environment. Hallam's and Elster's prints grab you and are the next best thing to being in the wild.

Natural elements



Karina Mendoza-Wittke adjusts one of the many paintings in her gallery. Ashland.news photo by Bob Palermini

Stepping into Art on First is like stepping into a remembering. So much of the work is created from the elements: wood, minerals, stones along with natural fibers. Mendoza-Wittke has chosen the work of artists from Lithia Artisans Market, a mainstay in

Ashland for over 20 years, and several local and internationally born artists as well.

“Would you like a tour, or would you like to browse?” she asks.

“A tour please.”

Mendoza-Wittke walks among the works speaking about each reverently, in a hushed tone, as if we were moving through a museum.

“This is Jan Van Ek’s work, her work captures the power of nature.”



A wild horse sculpture by Jan Van Ek at the Art on First gallery. Ashland.news photo by Bob Palermini

We are gazing at her wild horse sculpture. It evokes the majesty and movement of galloping horses. Van Ek, originally from Medford, spent 22 years working in Denver, where she became nationally recognized as an equine sculptor. She returned in 2004 to Oregon, where she has built her dream studio. Several of her finest pieces now reside in this space.

Mendoza-Wittke juries in artists’ work with fellow artists but has her own special prerequisites.

A ‘depth of spirit’

“I feel as though their art has to embody who they are. That there should be a ‘depth of spirit,’” she says.

“They must also be really nice people and a good fit.”

Mendoza-Wittke gives an overview: “I have cards and miniature baskets starting at \$5, glass ornaments starting at \$8, mini hand-bound journals for \$10 to \$12 all the way to bronze whales that are over \$10,000.”

Many of the items are reasonably priced for Ashland visitors to take home as precious keepsakes, and they include jewelry, silks, prints, nature photos, pottery, textiles and other art pieces. Mendoza-Wittke’s earth-grown, energy-inspired jewelry is among them.

She has been selling pieces through the Lithia Artisans and her website [AlmaMiaJewelry.com](https://almamijewelry.com) (<https://almamijewelry.com/>), and now her necklace and earring sets have found a home here. She uses metal sheet and wire, mostly sterling silver but also gold fill and copper. And she chooses stones with an organic beauty made from amber, obsidian, opal, pearls and more. There are necklace and earring sets that would be the desire of the most decorated Aztec princess.

This is a magical gallery, with directional lighting and appealingly appointed artworks popping up around every curve and corner.

"Luckily, the space had been a gallery before," says Mendoza-Wittke. I kept the lighting system and just updated it."



Karina Mendoza-Wittke's earth-grown, energy-inspired jewelry is prominently on display in the gallery. Ashland.news photo by Bob Palermini



Karina Mendoza-Wittke carries the work of international and many local artists at Art on First. Ashland.news photo by Bob Palermini

Family ties

Several paintings taking advantage of that light are those of Martina Goldberg Wittke, her mother, and one of the people who inspired this venture. Goldberg Wittke was the curator of her own gallery in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, for years. She says of her acrylic seascapes and landscapes, oozing dawn and sunset colors, "I want (people) to feel my landscapes, not just see them."

There are smoothly carved wood sculptures that reflect the aged growth and wisdom of trees, by Glenn Calascibetta who is inspired by Humboldt County, California's redwood forests and rocky coastline. Calascibetta started out creating complex mobiles of driftwood. He later graduated to adding gemstones and seashells. They are eye-catching as you stroll by.

One could say artist Erin Linton is a bit of a bird whisperer. She has been saving injured birds since she was a child and would go birding yearly with her father to the Klamath Bird Refuge. Now she paints them in India ink washes, endangered species and all,



The Art on First gallery across from the Ashland Springs Hotel, is open Wednesday through Sunday. Ashland.news photo by Bob Palermini

on textural backgrounds which are created from teabags. She says the teabags, with their muted colors “enhance the natural qualities of fur and feathers.” According to her bio, many of the birds she depicts migrate to Southern Oregon.

The gallery also features the art of Esau Andrade an internationally acclaimed folk artist originally from Nayarit, Mexico, and currently residing in Southern California. Inspired by fellow artist Diego Rivera, a bit remindful of Marc Chagall, his work conjures up dreamlike states in primary colors.

Local artists

Other local artists currently featured are: Jessica Johnson, Jeff Addicott, Shanna Rose, Margarita Castillo, Katrina Meister, Leah Fairbanks, Rebecca Hobbs, Alissa Clark, Tamlyn McDonald, Scott Carlson, Nancy Yturriaga Adams, Rachel Fisher, Elizabeth Flanagan, Dana Bilello-Barrow, Carel Shoner, Leigh Normandin, John Palombo, Joy Light, Joi Tripp, Trace Taber, Misty Porter, Suzan Hatch and Corbin Brashier. All are featured on the website artonfirstashland.com.

It seems as though opening Art on First was a courageous undertaking in a town where businesses are constantly evolving since the COVID pandemic. But Mendoza-Wittke is determined, passionate, inspired and up for the challenge. After all, she made *this dream happen*.

The gallery is open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. The gallery regularly participates in Ashland’s First Friday Artwalk. Check the Art on First (<https://artonfirstashland.com/gallery>) website for more information.

Reach Ashland-based writer Lucie K. Scheuer at LucieScheuer19@gmail.com (<mailto:LucieScheuer19@gmail.com>).

Share This Article

 Jim



A FUN-RAISER! **PICNIC** FOR POLLINATOR PALS! SAT 21 JUNE 4 PM - 7 PM FAMILIES! JOIN IN THE FUN THIS SUMMER! THE 3RD WEEK OF JUNE IS NATIONAL POLLINATOR WEEK! Pollinator Youth Education! Awareness Creates Change! Food • Wine • Games & Activities • Puppets • Music • Farm Tour © ARPEGGIO VINEYARD & SUNFLOWER FARM, 3578 PIONEER RD, MEDFORD Pollinator Project Rogue Valley 501(c)(3) nonprofit

(<https://www.pollinatorprojectrogu山谷.org/>)



In-person classes Join a Community of Curious Adults Online classes

- Hundreds of classes, take all you can
- Social events, discussion groups, activities
- All-inclusive annual member fee of \$150

541-552-6048 olli@sou.edu OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE Southern OREGON UNIVERSITY Come for the classes... Stay for the connections

(<https://sou.edu/olli/>)