

# Waterville's former Ken-A-Set store will host Israeli artist, community exhibit

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WATERVILLE — The recently vacated Ken-A-Set thrift store on College Avenue will temporarily reopen later this month as a community art space with the help of an Israeli artist who will be setting up a classroom and studio in the space.

Shirel Horovitz is a Tel Aviv-based artist who is known for her multimedia work, which she describes as socially based.



Horovitz



The now closed Ken-A-Set building in downtown Waterville on Wednesday. Staff photo by David Leaming  
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She arrived in Portland on Monday and in Waterville on Wednesday, her first time in Maine.

“I usually arrive at a place and use my surroundings, the history, the people there, the way it looks, the weather, the social and economic situation, all of that goes into a research process and slowly it becomes pieces of video, sound and text that form into installations and sometimes into performances,” said Horovitz, 36.

Horovitz will be an artist and scholar in residence at Colby College, and her stay is also being sponsored by the Beth Israel Congregation, Common Street Arts and the downtown organization Waterville Creates!.

In addition to creating art, she will host a workshop series for high school students, “Story-based Art, a Visual Narrative Workshop for Teens,” that will explore how stories can be told through writing, performance and art. The students’ final projects will be on display in the College Avenue building in May.

“I literally got a car this morning and went to get groceries,” Horovitz said on Wednesday, adding that she hopes to explore more of the city as research for her art work in the coming weeks. She is planning to start working out of the Ken-A-Set building around April 10.

Horovitz, who attended Bezalel Academy of Art and Design and Tel Aviv University in Israel, lived in the south end of Tel Aviv, which she described as a diverse mixed neighborhood with younger and older residents, refugees and foreign workers.

She’s living in the Hathaway Center, which overlooks the Kennebec River. “I’m still stunned by the fact that I have a river outside of my window,” she said. “It’s hard to explain what it means to me to look out the window and see such a distant view.”

This will be the first time she has worked outside of Israel.

“I like to gather information through people I meet and then read background information. When I come to a new place, I prefer the firsthand experience and meeting the people,” she said.

Even the simple act of getting groceries in Waterville has been eye-opening.

“The types of food you find on the shelves, the way it’s organized, the prices, everything is very telling,” she said. “Anywhere I go that’s where I start — at the basics.”

Horovitz has also started a blog — [Outsider in Waterville](#) — through which she hopes to document and share her experience. “It’s obviously very basic because I’ve been here for a moment and a half, but it will be a place where my conversation with myself about what I’m seeing is open to the public and it’s not only mine,” she said.

Rachel Isaacs, an assistant professor of Jewish Studies at Colby and the spiritual leader of the Beth Israel Congregation, said she hopes Horovitz’s presence in Waterville will help strengthen the ties between the organizations that are sponsoring her, as well as bring an awareness of global events to the community.

“She’s a really inspirational teacher of topics related to Judaism in Israel, and I’m excited for her to bring that knowledge to campus and to the community,” Isaacs said.

In February, Skills Inc., a nonprofit group that owns the space at 1 College Ave., announced it would move [the Ken-A-Set thrift store](#) to Pittsfield after more than 30 years in Waterville. Skills, which is based in St. Albans, aims to help adults with disabilities by placing them in jobs at places like the thrift store. They cited competition as their main reason for relocating.

The Ervin Center day program, which was also run by Skills and was in the basement, also moved, and the company is trying to sell the building, said Skills Chief Executive Officer Tom Davis.

In the meantime, Davis said he was approached by Nate Rudy, the executive director of Waterville Creates!, about possibly using the space for a community art exhibit and agreed to provide it at no cost to Horovitz or the groups involved.

“We don’t have any current use for it, and he thought it would be a good place to home this art exhibit for a few months,” Davis said. “I think if we can do something in the short-term that helps the Waterville community out, that’s great.”

Though she has yet to set foot in the Ken-A-Set building, Horovitz said she was excited about the downtown location.

“A lot of what I do has always been connected to the neighborhoods near where I live,” she said. “It’s extremely exciting to come to a new place and discover how it works when I don’t know the place or the people. In that way it’s very new and exciting.”

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