

# The Silvermine Story

An Interview with Barbara Linarducci, Chief Executive Officer;  
Rose-Marie Fox and Svetlin Tchakarov, Co-Chairs; and Roger Mudre, Gallery Director, Silvermine Arts Center

**EDITORS' NOTES** Barbara Linarducci serves as the Chief Executive Officer and Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees at the Silvermine Arts Center. Since 2016, she has played a pivotal role alongside Board Chair Rose-Marie Fox in rescuing the century-old Arts Institution from dire financial circumstances. In a bold move, Linarducci implemented a significant restructuring of the management team and staff, leading to her assuming multiple additional roles including CFO, CIO, Development Officer, and Facilities Manager. Over a 25-year career in the computer software industry, Linarducci honed her expertise in two emerging technologies, namely Database Management and Enterprise Content Management. Her journey in the software industry began as a technologist, and she swiftly transitioned into sales roles, eventually assuming sales and service management positions in both well-established companies and startups. Linarducci's passion for art runs deep, not only as a dedicated CEO, but also as an art lover and artisan.



Barbara Linarducci



Rose-Marie Fox



Svetlin Tchakarov



Roger Mudre

Rose-Marie Fox's life has been a fabric woven with art, profession, philanthropy, and adventure. From a young age, she created art on every surface available, culminating in her graduating with a BFA from Manhattanville College. At the same time, she studied accounting with an eye to a future career. Upon graduation, Fox commenced her career at AT&T in the areas of capital budgeting and strategic planning. Seeking advanced education in business, Fox achieved an MBA from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. She headed to Wall Street and built a career in investment banking representing the "Bell" companies at Lehman Brothers as a Senior Vice President, Corporate Finance. During this period, Fox served on the board of several New York City charitable and cultural not-for-profits such as Roundabout Theatre, and United Neighborhood Housing. Her career took a turn with an invitation from Edelson Technology Partners (ETP) to serve on the Valuation Committee of the board of ETP, a technology venture capital firm with corporate investors including AT&T and 3M.

With ETP backing, Fox founded Cornerstone Financial Co. with a focus on private equity and M&A in China which, in the early 1990s, was opening to foreign investment and partnerships. Retiring in 2011 at the age of 60, Fox relished the opportunity to return to art and enrolled full-time at Silvermine School of Art where she was very impressed by the excellence of the instruction and the warmth of the Silvermine artist community. Fox was invited by Roger Mudre to join the Board and then shortly thereafter to succeed him as Board Chair as he was at the end of his term though he committed his continuing support. Seeing a rare opportunity to make a difference in a nearly 100-year-old institution by deploying professional management with an entrepreneurial spirit, Fox took on the challenge and a new personal adventure.

As a passionate connoisseur and advocate for the arts, Svetlin Tchakarov has dedicated a significant portion of his life fostering artistic creativity and expression. For over a decade, he has worked at Diageo, a global leader in beverage alcohol, in various Director roles where he has cultivated extensive experience in directing and improving operational performance. His enduring love for art and its digital evolution led him to the role as Co-Chair at the Silvermine Art Center. Always captivated by the convergence between technology and creativity, Tchakarov is an avid collector of largely digital art. Recognizing the enormous potential of the nascent metaverse, he sponsored the creation of the Silvermine Art Center's virtual gallery in Somnium Space. Tchakarov's vision for the future is to continue pushing the boundaries of digital art, to develop a vibrant and inclusive worldwide community that appreciates creativity, and to pave the way for the next generation of artists and collectors.

Roger Mudre is a seasoned professional in the art industry, currently serving as the Gallery Director at Silvermine. His career in the arts began in 1976 when he joined Koenig Artist Supplies where he gained valuable experience and knowledge of the business world. In 1993, Mudre embarked on an entrepreneurial journey as a self-employed decorative painter, honing his artistic skills and expanding his creative repertoire. Mudre's association with Silvermine began in 1997, and since then he has held various roles within the organization, including trustee, Board Chair, and Co-Chair of the Silvermine Guild of Artists. In 2017, he assumed the pivotal position of Gallery Director, responsible for curating thought-provoking exhibitions exploring art's societal significance. Mudre's ability to connect deeply with the artists he represents stems from his background as a practicing artist represented by galleries, granting him a unique perspective and enabling him to advocate for their work effectively. Beyond his work at Silvermine, Mudre has dedicated over four decades of his life to a high school drama program. In this role, he has used the transformative power of the arts to engage troubled and extraordinary needs teenagers, providing them with an outlet for self-expression and personal growth. Mudre's contributions to the arts have been widely recognized, and in 2004 he received the prestigious State of Connecticut Advocate for the Arts Award.

**INSTITUTION BRIEF** Founded in 1922, and incorporated in 1924, the Silvermine Arts Center ([silvermineart.org](http://silvermineart.org)) exhibits, teaches, collects, and interprets contemporary art for the inspiration and education of the public. Since its founding, Silvermine has grown to encompass a Guild of over 300 professional artists; five Galleries welcoming 12,000 visitors annually; a School of Art with over 4,000 annual enrollments, offering classes in an extraordinary range of media for students of all ages and abilities; and Outreach Education Programs serving over 2,000 under-resourced students annually.



1930s figure drawing class at Silvermine Arts Center

**Will you discuss the history of Silvermine Arts Center and how Silvermine has evolved?**

*Linarducci:* We are excited to be celebrating our 100th anniversary. Silvermine was founded in the early 1900s by a colony of professional artists who were residents of New York City, but had summer homes in the New Canaan area. Their mission originally as a colony was to support each other in the artistic community, and to exhibit and critique each other's work. They formally organized as a Guild in 1922 and started the Silvermine School of Art. Education was a core focus for them.

There have been many changes at Silvermine over the past hundred years – we have grown from a single barn to a five-acre campus; we have a complex of five galleries; a School of Art with over 4,000 enrollments annually in a multitude of disciplines; as well as Outreach programs providing scholarships and educational opportunities for under-resourced students in our area. We also have a guild of over three hundred professional artists.

**How do you define Silvermine's mission?**

*Linarducci:* We believe that art is essential to the human experience, contributing to our well-being and providing opportunities for personal growth and expression. Silvermine's mission is to promote and encourage the development of the arts in all forms, showcasing and serving artists and providing opportunities for arts education and appreciation for the broader community.

Through our programming, Silvermine helps to support and nurture creativity and innovation. We foster an environment that encourages experimentation and exploration, giving artists the freedom to express themselves and push boundaries in their chosen medium. At the same time, we recognize the important role that arts education plays in the development of individuals and communities. By providing accessible

and inclusive opportunities for learning and engagement with the arts, Silvermine helps to build appreciation for the arts and to promote cultural understanding and awareness.

At the Silvermine Arts Center, we create a vibrant and supportive arts community that enriches the lives of all those who engage with us, whether as artists, students, or members of the public.

**What have been the keys to Silvermine's ability to stay relevant over 100 years?**

*Fox:* It comes down to passion. The artists are on the leading edge, whether they use their art to communicate what is happening in culture

and society, or in terms of medium, technique, or style – they are always pushing the envelope. That creativity, coupled with their passion, has kept Silvermine relevant for all these years. As we move into the next century for Silvermine, we are cognizant of maintaining the legacy and history while we move into the metaverse and digital art.

**How important is it to maintain the foundation and roots of Silvermine as it continues to evolve and adapt for the current times?**

*Fox:* It is essential. We always talk about our programs being pathways to proficiency, which is about taking the classical training and moving it forward. Our roots are fundamental to who we are as an organization and provide the foundation for everything we do.

**Will you provide a description of Silvermine School of Art?**

*Linarducci:* Since its establishment in 1922, education has played a crucial role in the development of Silvermine. The Guild and the School of Art, rooted in shared traditions, have consistently upheld their commitment to educational excellence and integrity. Their primary mission has always been to foster, promote, and inspire artistic pursuits and art education.

Today, the renowned School of Art stands as the premier educational institution for visual arts in Fairfield County. With an impressive enrollment of over 4,000 students annually, spanning from ages 4 to 94, it caters to individuals at all levels of artistic proficiency, ranging from beginners to advanced practitioners. Offering a diverse selection of more than 1,100 courses, workshops, and youth programs throughout the year, the school cultivates a nurturing environment. It strikes a balance between providing the freedom to explore one's creativity and instilling a strong foundation through disciplined instruction.



Teen plein air painting class in the Galleries garden



*Bronze pour and metal working in the sculpture studio*

What sets Silvermine apart and entices students to join and stay is its exceptional faculty of dedicated instructors. Additionally, the institution boasts the broadest array of disciplines available in the region, offering students unparalleled opportunities for artistic exploration. Indeed, there is no other place quite like Silvermine.

**What is the focus of the International Artist-in-Residency program?**

*Linarducci:* In 2019, Silvermine Arts Center established a new International Fulbright residency program, initiated and funded by artist and

philanthropist, Janet Hennessey Dilenschneider, and her husband, Robert Dilenschneider, and managed by the Institute of International Education (IIE). The IIE supports flagship exchange programs, including Fulbright, “to make the world a more interconnected place.”

The residency fosters creative and professional growth for emerging artists by providing an immersive environment on Silvermine’s campus with access to instructors in a wide range of mediums. These Fulbright scholars herald globally and contribute to art’s impact in creating a more connected world.

**Will you provide an overview of the Silvermine gallery?**

*Mudre:* I have been involved here since 1997 when I became a member, and have been involved in some aspects of the gallery for all that time. The gallery provides a place for our members to exhibit, and we now have artists from all over the world. When we were faced with the challenges of COVID, we immediately knew we needed to have a bigger presence online, and Barbara was able to secure the funding to make this happen. It is now possible to see every exhibit on our website and to see the artists and hear the artists talk about the artwork. Our artists are now seen worldwide.

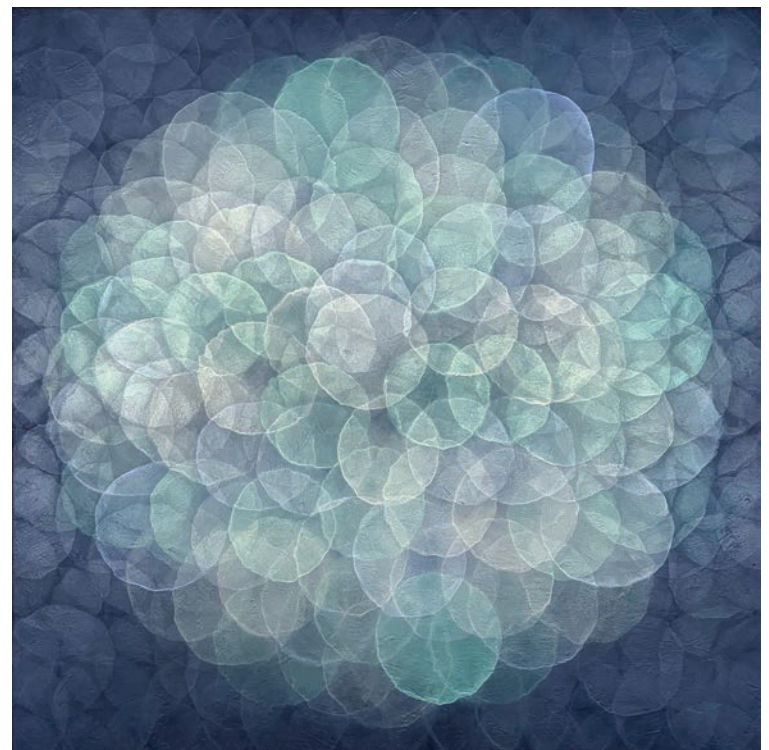
The Silvermine Galleries showcase contemporary art exhibitions featuring the work of local, national, and international artists. These exhibitions span various art forms, including painting, sculpture, photography, printmaking, and mixed media. The galleries provide a platform for artists to exhibit their work and engage with the community.

Silvermine has a long-standing history of organizing acclaimed and accessible exhibitions accompanied by robust programs that encourage engagement with not only works of art, but also with artists, curators, faculty, students, and visitors across generations, building a sense of community.

Silvermine also seeks to use exhibitions in our galleries as a springboard for conversations about aesthetic ideas, humanities themes, and interdisciplinary contexts. Our galleries are free and open to the public, as are most of our programs, reflecting our goal to enrich the lives of diverse artists, students, and visitors from all social, economic, and educational backgrounds. Silvermine continually aspires to strengthen its role as an inclusive gathering place for transformative experiences with art that inspires creativity.



*New Members Exhibition at Silvermine Galleries*



*Cereus, 48 x 48, Acrylic on panel by Roger Mudre*

### What are the objectives of Silvermine's Outreach Programs?

*Linarducci:* We believe the Arts have the power to shape and strengthen every aspect of a community. We know that art is a powerful tool for communication, education, enrichment and development for students of all ages and skill levels. Through our partnerships, Silvermine deepens and broadens its relevance to the community.

Our Educational Community Programs extend beyond the Silvermine campus to bring transformative programs that inspire creativity, build community, promote education, and offer enjoyment. Since 1992, Art Partners Programs have provided curriculum-based arts education for under-resourced Bridgeport, Norwalk and Stamford public schools. Serving over 2,000 at-risk urban youth annually, Art Partners help close Connecticut's educational achievement gap – one of the largest in the nation – by providing access to the arts and unique enrichment programs designed specifically to target critical student needs.

Our programs have a proven track record of fully engaging students in the advancement of their critical thinking, problem-solving and collaboration competencies, supporting better academic achievement and life skills. The distinctiveness of our program lies in our professional Teaching Artists and their ability to collaborate with classroom teachers to tailor curriculum-based art classes for K-8 students that address their developmental needs.

We develop projects based on where the students need the most assistance. We collaborate with the public schools to meet our collective goals of enhancing literacy and social/emotional skills while developing exciting projects that capture students' imaginations, provide



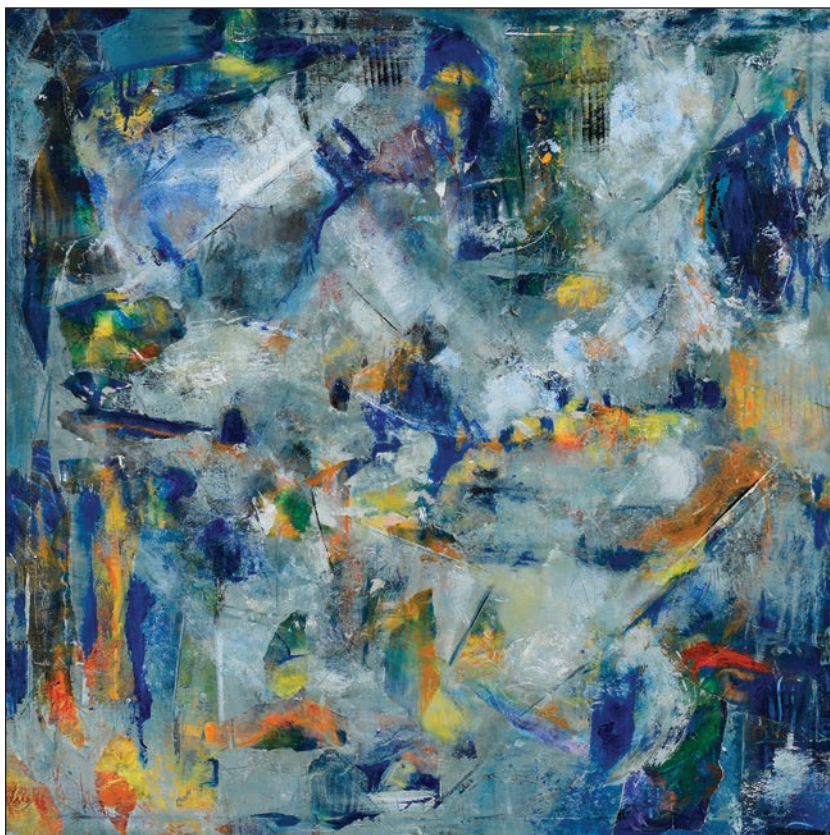
Colorful Birch Trees, *Diptych, Mixed Media 30 x 40 each by Jan Dilenschneider*

much needed life skills, and even create the next generation of artists and innovators.

In 2019, Silvermine launched a new "ArtAcademy" program in partnership with STAR, Inc. to benefit people with disabilities. STAR, Inc. provides services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) living in Fairfield County with opportunities to live full lives with respect, independence, freedom of choice and personal growth. ArtAcademy taps

into the transformative power of art to engage adults with I/DD in a variety of classes in an inclusive setting on our campus.

Professional art instruction encourages curiosity and builds skills and self-esteem. The program fosters not only artistic and social development, but also joy through art. Teaching Artists design the curriculum to encourage personal accomplishment and collaborative engagement with others as a team.



Pytr's Flute, *36 x 36, Oil on canvas by Rose-Marie Fox*



Flowers in the Field, *36 x 36, Oil on canvas by Jan Dilenschneider*



*Silvermine's ArtAcademy outreach program reaches into the community to inspire creativity*

ArtAcademy offers the resources and pathways for adults with I/DD to explore, develop, and share their talents – and perhaps even discover skills that might lead to career development.

**You mentioned the need for Silvermine to pivot quickly to address the challenges resulting from the pandemic. Will you elaborate on how Silvermine navigated this uncertain and difficult time?**

*Linarducci:* This was a very challenging time for Silvermine. We decided to close the facility earlier than most, but began to immediately plan for reopening as soon as possible. I personally felt strongly about the need to reopen because I believed that the community needed the type of experience that they get at Silvermine. Once we closed, we quickly engaged our website developers and, as Roger mentioned, we began to put our exhibitions online. Even though we were closed, Roger was in the gallery every day accepting work and photographing pieces to get them ready for the website. We knew that we needed to focus our efforts around social media in order to let people know that Silvermine was still here and operating.

We also had to invest in our facilities to prepare for reopening with new air filtration systems, and we implemented new safety procedures for how we were going to reopen. When the State of Connecticut allowed us to reopen, we were one of the first to open.

*Fox:* We were able to open for the children and youth in the New Canaan area when they had been so isolated during this time. We held the classes outside which provided more space, did temperature checks, everyone wore masks, and as a result, we had no spread of COVID from Silvermine so the procedures were effective. We knew that the community needed Silvermine and we were there for the community.

*Mudre:* When we reopened the gallery, we did it by reservation. We were fully booked because

I think that people just wanted to get outside and see art and feel a sense of normalcy. This was a difficult time for everyone in the community, and Silvermine was able to be a positive force for the well-being of our community.

*Fox:* I would add that because we had been financially responsible since the time we took over the management and leadership of Silvermine in 2016, we were able to financially weather the COVID storm. It was critical that we had effectively planned and managed our finances which is a testament to the strength and commitment of our entire leadership team.

**How are you addressing the balance between the importance of the physical location for Silvermine and the growth of its online offerings?**

*Mudre:* The online presence has been very valuable as we have increased art sales from people who viewed us online. We've noticed that many people who come to the gallery will tell us that they have already viewed the exhibition, so it has in many ways provided an invitation to get people to come through the door.

*Fox:* I think the in-person experience is critical throughout Silvermine, from our classes to the gallery, since there are emotions that you can only experience when you are here. That being said, online has given us much wider exposure and people who would have probably had no interaction with us now do. It has been more about expanding our reach, not replacing the importance of our facilities.

**How do you describe the Silvermine experience?**

*Linarducci:* I would call it inspiring. We have open houses every Fall when we have our instructors come and give demonstrations in their different areas of expertise and mediums. This allows the community to come to Silvermine and experience it, meet the instructors, talk about the classes offered, and see live demonstrations. Silvermine is part of the fabric of New Canaan, and the Fairfield County community. We are at the center of the community – engaging, socializing, and coming together around art and creativity.

**Will you discuss the strength of the Silvermine staff?**

*Linarducci:* Each member of our team brings unique skills and talents to the table, creating a formidable force that propels us forward. The strength of our staff lies not only in their individual capabilities, but also in their ability to collaborate seamlessly as a cohesive unit. We recognize



*International Fulbright Artist-in-Residence, Razel Mari from the Philippines, at Silvermine*

the power of teamwork and understand that by combining our strengths and leveraging our diverse perspectives, we can overcome challenges that come our way.

**Will you discuss the importance of Silvermine having such an engaged and committed board?**

*Fox:* One of the things that I love to hear from management and the board is how well they operate with each other. There is an open dialogue between board members and management – the communication channels are open and it is a tremendous working relationship. When we assumed responsibility at Silvermine we started evolving the board to encompass the artistic side and the business side. On the business side, the directors have a real passion for the arts, but may not be artists themselves. We have leadership expertise across the business spectrum, including finance, legal, marketing, sales, and technology. On the artistic side, we have a gallery director, guild artists, educators – it is really a blend. The board knows that we need money to make this organization work, and is very strong personally with philanthropy as well as reaching out to the community for support.

*Linarducci:* We believe leadership comes from selecting and developing the right team at the Board and at key management and staff positions that share a vision for the future and flexibility to react to opportunities and challenges, with a spirit of open communication, respectful dialogue, and an action-oriented approach where advancement to goals is predictable.

**What has made the working relationship between all of you work so well?**

*Mudre:* I think a big part of it is that we are truly friends. We work so closely together and have created a great relationship, based on mutual respect and trust. We will be friends long after we leave Silvermine.



*Adult portrait painting class*

*Fox:* When we took over Silvermine, it was in a very difficult place financially. It needed people with passion who were not going to let it fail. We looked at each other and knew we could do it – I come from a finance background, Barbara from an operations background, and Roger from his artist background. We made a commitment that we were going to turn the ship around and save Silvermine. We went from many years of losses prior to our leadership, and after the first year, turned it positive. When you go through that experience together, it forges friendships.

*Linarducci:* We changed a lot of the staff, and even though we have a small staff, we have brought on people with a can-do attitude who work collaboratively and share a common goal. We are a team, and our success has been because of the strength of every member of the team.

**What are your plans for Silvermine as you embark on the next century?**

*Tchakarov:* For the past century, Silvermine Arts Center has championed art creation as well as its understanding and appreciation. As we embark on the next century, we are implementing new ideas to entice young artists and collectors, notably by expanding into the metaverse by launching in 2022, Silvermine Galleries in Somnium Space, now open to visitors from all around the world. This digital addition transcends geographical limits, increases the accessibility of art, and encourages cultural exchange. Anyone from anywhere in the world is welcome to come see it, enjoy it, and engage in conversation with other art enthusiasts and collectors in an immersive environment. Our mission is to develop on-line communities and virtual spaces in which guests can interact not only with works, but also with the artists directly, fostering a deeper connection.

Through expansion into the metaverse, Silvermine aims to broaden the art experience, engaging larger audiences and presenting novel opportunities for artists and collectors, while preserving Silvermine's classical art appreciation and cultural legacy.

**As Silvermine celebrates its 100th anniversary, are you able to enjoy the process and appreciate what you have accomplished?**

*Fox:* We love the process. Even in the most difficult of times, we embraced the struggle, taking on the challenge to achieve what we knew was necessary.

*Linarducci:* We support each other and we are all committed to leaving Silvermine better than how we found it. ●



*Silvermine's Art Partners outreach program 5th grade mural project*