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New Year's Celebration leads to a Cross-Cultural Collaboration

*The New Brunswick Jazz Project
Reader Submitted*

When best selling author Virginia DeBerry attended a New Year's Eve dinner at New Brunswick, New Jersey's Alfa Gallery, she anticipated only an entertaining evening with friends old and new, and a different way to begin a new decade. Instead, the event gave rise to the Uptown exhibit, pairing Uptown, the latest novel by DeBerry and her writing partner Donna Grant, with the paintings of noted Bulgarian artist Vesselin Kourtev.

"I visited the gallery and was shown several canvases of Vesselin's new work," says DeBerry. "One painting in particular struck me as representative of both the closeness and the struggle between cousins Avery and Dwight, the main characters in our book." This realization led to a discussion about the relationships between different art forms which proved to be the catalyst for gallery co-owner Galina Kourtev to put together a show called Uptown. Each painting is named for a chapter in the book, and Vesselin drew inspiration from the story for one special work entitled "Uptown."

The 2000's have witnessed both the real estate boom and the real estate meltdown. The fluctuating market has made headlines nationwide. In the seventh novel by Virginia DeBerry and Donna Grant, they too reached for the headlines in undertaking a story as big as New York City itself, following a wealthy, prominent family caught in a storm of sexual scandal, secrets, betrayal, and politics. What is the true price of greed, unfettered ambition—and forgiveness?

Vesselin Kourtev's work has an overtone of alluring energy in the figures and their composition with the background, offering the viewer ghostly, yet harmonious, visions of an abstract world. His tones and hues, especially in his painting Full to the brim of future (Chapter 20), express a sense of liberation as birds cascade over a saturated green landscape presenting a celebration of hope. The product of this process of creating a relationship between language—the novel, and image is to build the bridge between different art mediums and to create a layer of ideas, a central theme in Kourtev's work.

About the Authors:

VIRGINIA DEBERRY of North Brunswick, was formerly the vice-president of BB/LW, an agency for plus size and petite models as well as a spokeswoman for Hanes hosiery. She currently lives in New Jersey. DONNA GRANT, a Brooklyn native, currently lives in the borough with her husband. Before becoming a novelist, she spent more than a decade as a plus-sized model. DeBerry and Grant have co-authored seven novels including—Exposures (as Marie Joyce), Tryin' to Sleep in the Bed You Made (Merit Award/Fiction, Black Caucus of the American Library Association), Far From the Tree (New York Times Bestseller), Better Than I Know Myself (Open Book Award, Essence Bestseller, Best African American Fiction 2004 Borders and Waldenbooks) and Gotta Keep on Tryin'—turning a nearly 30 year friendship into one of the most successful and enduring writing collaboration in fiction.

For more information on UPTOWN visit: www.deberryandgrant.com or www.simonandschuster.com.

