

ARCHIVE BLAST

Origins of Nossi College of Art & Design



Nossi Vatandoost

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"It was this lively environment of learning and family." -Cyrus Vatandoost on his mother's studio in Madison.

Did You Know:

"Nossi" is a Persian name associated with the English words of "sweet," "delightful," and "pleasant."

Who is Nossi Vatandoost?

Nossi Vatandoost, founder of Nossi College of Art & Design, is from Persia (modern day Iran). She moved to Europe in 1963 to study art, and afterwards she immigrated to America to study at Western Kentucky University. In 1970, she became an art teacher for Metro Nashville schools, but found herself increasingly frustrated by a lack of art supplies.

In a 2009 interview, Vatandoost said “all they had was manila paper and also crayons and pencils.” She brought any supply she had at home to her art classes. Vatandoost requested more supplies, but her request was denied. She soon left Metro Nashville schools to attempt teaching art on her own.



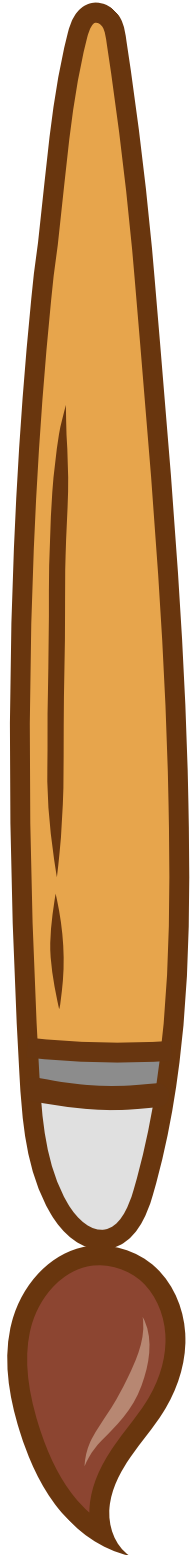
An early photo from Vatandoost's art school in 1981.



Mr. Joseph Escue, a student of Vatandoost's in the 80s.



Summer 1979



Vatandoost's Art School

Vatandoost began her art classes with three students under the age of 8, and charged \$3 per class. A parent of one of the children allowed Vatandoost to teach classes in her kitchen in exchange for free art classes. In that kitchen, what would become Nossi College of Art & Design was established. Soon, Vatandoost needed more space for her classes. She rented a studio in Madison.



Though there were bumps along the way, Vatandoost's art school thrived. As she began to outgrow her Madison studio, she attempted to secure a loan to purchase a larger space. She was denied the loan, but her art school continued to grow. "I needed more teachers and secretaries," she said. "It just kept growing and growing." Now, in 2026, Nossi College of Art & Design has been fostering developing artists for 53 years.

Nossi Vatandoost is 92, and her son Cyrus is now the president and CEO of the college. He reflects upon his mother's journey to start the school: "For a woman coming from the Middle East to have the gumption to study here, without knowing anyone, having no family – I think when students see how much she has accomplished, they will say 'I can do this too.'"