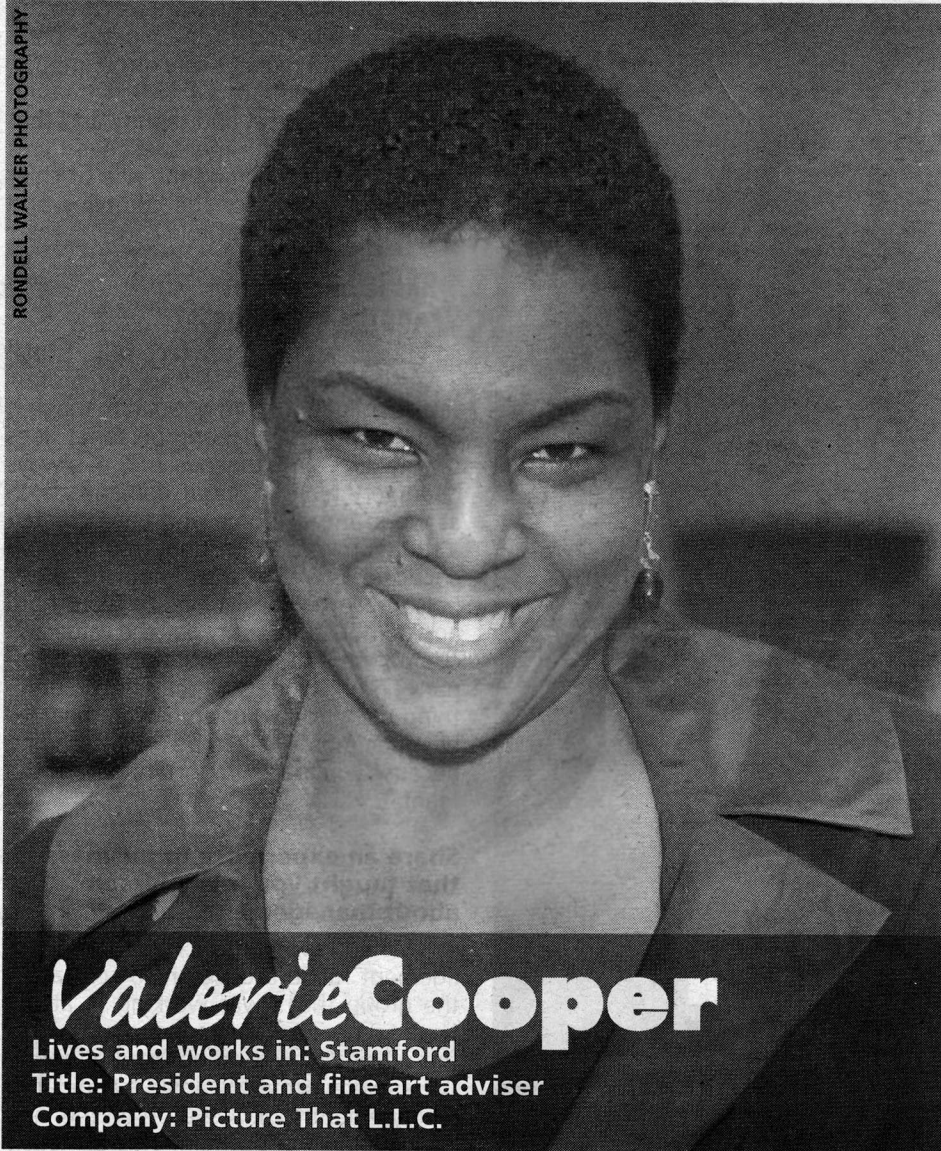


FAB *ulous* FAIR *field*



Meet some of Fairfield's most fabulous women.

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Valerie Cooper

Lives and works in: Stamford
 Title: President and fine art adviser
 Company: Picture That L.L.C.

Your transition from corporate life to one of entrepreneurship is unique and powerful. Share it.

"About 20 years ago, I started a part-time art distribution company at the beginning of my career at Goldman Sachs in New York City. The passion of art and art among cultures was really becoming in vogue, it captured my interest and I couldn't get enough of it. In the late '90s, I was starting to make money and the income was competing with my Wall Street salary. I thought, 'If I do this full time, there is no other feeling than the one I create for myself.' I just had

to know what it would be like to start my own company. It was a part-time business that captured my heart. I was a software development technologist and completely left-brain, so this was a release to do something more creative. I called it Picture That. It started demanding so much of my time that I had to stop. I thought, 'Goldman Sachs? The best bank on Wall Street. Am I crazy?' But, I had to do it. The day before 9/11, Monday, Sept. 10, 2001, I handed in my resignation. It was a very hard decision, but this thing called art was tugging at my heart. So, I took the plunge. I was

so happy I handed in my resignation the day before 9/11 and that it didn't affect my decision. The world was very different the next day."

Back when you worked part-time for Picture That, you were also developing curricula for Stamford Public Schools and Stamford Center for the Arts. What interesting work has the company led you to?

"A big part of what I have done as an entrepreneur is to give myself permission to transition my business along with changes in the market, economy and my preferences. What I began with is very different than what I have now. Every client and piece of art is unique in their own right. Right now, I am working with the Connecticut Department of Correction to provide an art education curriculum for their clientele. Who would have thought I'd have to think about that sort of delivery and that population? For me, it's an added level of responsibility. A true goal of mine is to make an impact on someone's life, to have another set of requirements other than, 'Can you come in and make our conference room look pretty?'"

What is your opinion on diversity in the workplace?

"I have been a diversity practitioner for what feels like forever. It is ingrained in the workplace at this point. Back in the '80s and '90s when I worked on diversity initiatives at Goldman, we had to think a lot about diversity and how to create awareness. From a business perspective, it's a necessity. If you want diverse ideas and opinions, it makes good business sense. People don't have to justify its existence much anymore. I think the challenges are different for women and minorities. In other countries, I think it's a human nuance to 'deal with something that's different.' I think that thanks to President Barack Obama, our nation will be transformed by leaps and bounds. It doesn't mean the world is perfect, but I think the milestone he has placed on the nation's diversity trend is super significant."