

# Inside The Artist's Studio



Sculptor Wally Palmer in his studio

**Editor's Note:** A few years ago we offered a look into a few artist's studios. It was interesting, but we got busy and I didn't have time to keep up with that feature. This month, Murray Sease of La Petite Gallerie in Bluffton, SC, sent us an article about one of her fellow gallery artists. And she plans to visit several more during 2024.

## Studio with a View by Murray Sease

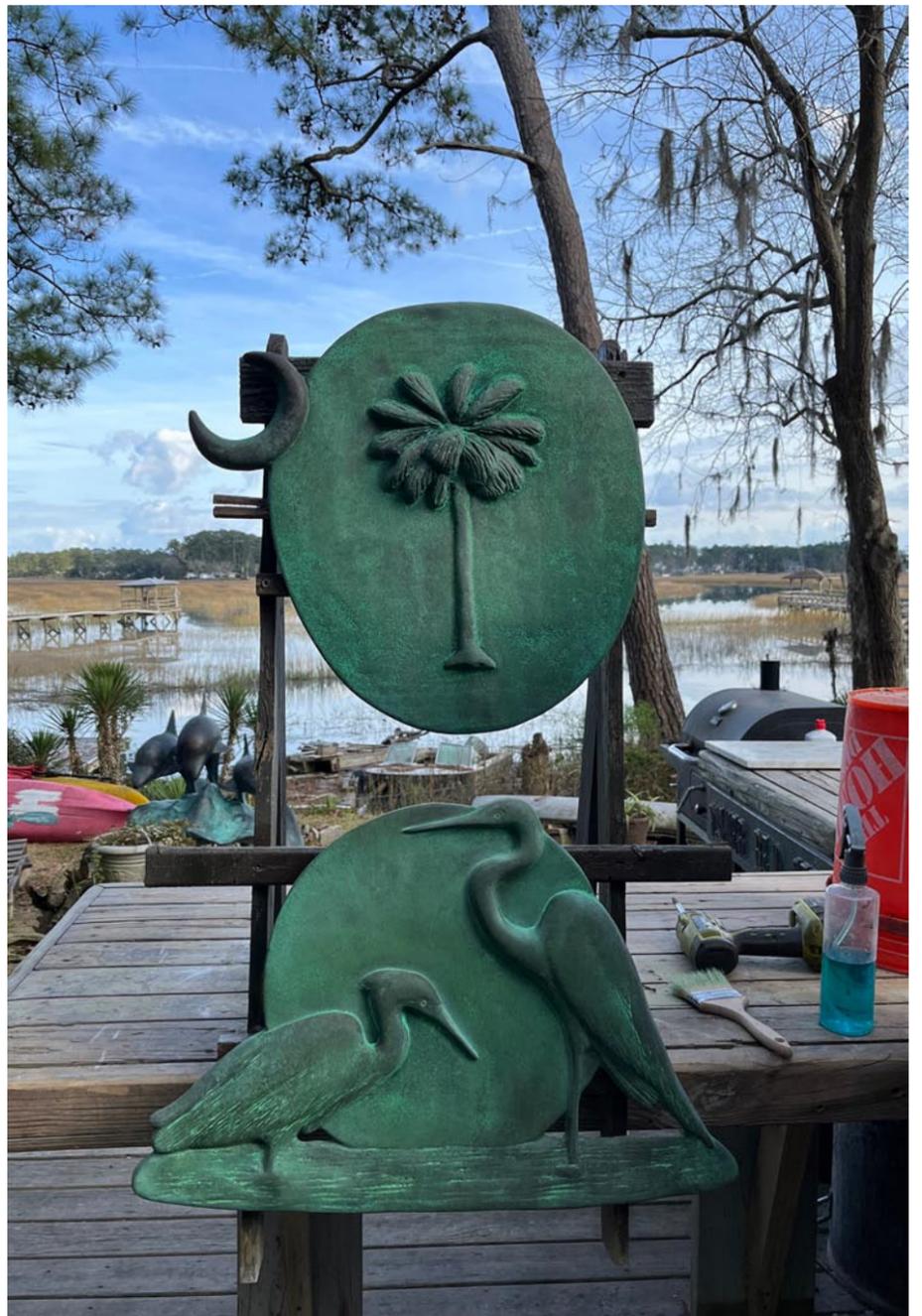
Sculptor Wally Palmer may have the most picturesque workspace in Beaufort County, SC. Spectacular sunrises over the Okatie River jump start each day for this lowcountry artist. When I visited his 'Smoking Bird Studio' on a recent winter afternoon, Wally had the wood fire stoked in the indoor studio space that is chock full of the tools of his trade – brushes, paints, molds, and hand tools of all kinds. It was toasty warm and cozy, with two of his relief sculptures laid out awaiting the next step in their patina process.

But looking out over his work tables, through the wall of windows, over his decks and yard filled with various projects to the incoming tide, the chilly outdoor area was irresistible. Out there on the work deck Wally demonstrated spraying the chemicals necessary to oxidize the bronze coating onto two more of his pieces, transforming them to a beautiful green patina. Next he will start the burnishing process, using steel wool to

rub through the patina to bring out a glimmer from the metal below, looking for the areas to best show perfect reflections and highlights. Then will come a coat of wax and buffing which captures that 'point of perfection' which is unique to each piece.

Probably best known for these bas-relief sculptures of bronze and iron over resin, Wally's art graces many lowcountry homes and outdoor living areas. Before the final patina and buffing that I got to witness, a process of sculpting with clay, building a mold around it and mixing and pouring a resin material into that, makes each piece a multi-step endeavor. The main subject matters are local wading birds and creatures from the sea – crabs, shrimp, turtles and fish. His line of palmetto trees, some featuring a South Carolina moon, are delightful. They are all substantial pieces of art that have beautiful patinas – some with iron finishes are charmingly rusty, while the bronze finishes have varying degrees of a natural green/blue patina that just looks better and better with age.

Influenced not only by his incredibly talented family of artists (including his father, famed sculptor Walter Palmer) Wally looks to the old masters as well as more modern creators like Georgia O'Keefe and Ernie Barnes for his inspiration. With these influences dancing in his head Wally designs and builds large scale sculptural pieces and fountains, sometimes including tabby (a



Two bas relief sculptures awaiting burnishing – check out the studio view.

traditional lowcountry building material composed of ground oyster shells, lime, and sand, mixed with salt water) and glass beads. He often incorporates recycled materials such as styrofoam blocks he collects from the waterways that his studio overlooks. He is happiest as he carves out armatures for large sculptures, adding fiberglass – using both reductive and additive process of sculpting – concentrating on what he wants to say as an artist.

Wally also has a thriving sculpture repair business, dedicated to restoring his father's humorous birds and other sculptures that are so popular here and around the country. Many of them have spent their lives outdoors where the weather has been very hard on them, and the older-style materials used when they were first created have not held up well. Using improved compounds and materials, replacing wooden legs and

beaks with bronze, Wally and his crew have brought many of them back to their former glory for their happy owners. I was delighted to get to see several of these pieces in various stages of repair and recline around the studio and property.

Wally Palmer is one of six artist/owners of the cooperative La Petite Gallerie in Old Town Bluffton. When he can tear himself away from his glorious studio Wally mans the gallery desk – and garden deck – usually on Fridays and festival days. His, long-time girlfriend Denise Pope, and a fluctuating gang of local musicians often entertain visitors with foot-stomping bluegrass music during Art Walks and other outdoor events – always open to the public.

This article was submitted by Murray Sease, fellow artist at La Petite Gallerie 56 Calhoun Street, Bluffton, SC, 29910. For more info visit ([lapetitegallerie.com](http://lapetitegallerie.com)).



Finished work by Wally Palmer



Palmer in his studio applying the chemicals which create the green/blue patina.