

Editorial Commentary

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numbers are going to take a dive from this year because of what's changed with ArtFields under its new artistic leadership.

First lets start with the ArtFields 2018 Award Winners: (Info given is prize, artist's name, cash prize, and (price given by artist)). * Represented by Wim Roefs' at if ART Gallery and ** SC artists

Grand Prize - Michaela Pilar Brown* & ** \$50,000 (\$6,000)

Second Place Prize - Kristi Ryba** \$25,000 (\$30,000)

People's Choice 2-D - Colin Quashie** \$12,500 (\$24,500)

People's Choice 3-D - Victoria Hagner** \$12,500 (\$6,500)

(If you noticed it was a clean sweep of SC winners. And, the top winner is represented by Wim Roefs ArtFields' new artistic director.)

Category Award Winner \$1,500 each

Drawing - Janet Kozachek**
Installation - Maggie Evans GA
Painting - Kevin Spaulding**
Printmaking - Jim Creal**
Digital Media - Chalet Comellas FL
Mixed Media - Tyrone Geter**
Photography - Brant Barrett **
Sculpture - Bran Rapp**

(Six out of eight winners also from SC.)

ArtField's 2018 Merit Award Winners \$1,000

Katie Beall, GA
Allen Coles**
Peter Lenzo* & **
Colin Quashie**
Thomas Schmidt, Jefferson Ellinger, Paul Stockhoff NC
Judy Shreve GA
SmithTownsend Collaborative KY
Tom Stanley* & **
Laura Spong* & **
Ross Turner LA

(Five out of ten from SC and three represented by Wim Roefs.)

Now as far as I know, Roefs had no hand in selecting ArtFields' winners, but he did help select the jurors who determined who got in the competition and the jurors who selected the winner. The only awards we know he had nothing to do with for sure was the two People's Choice Awards. But then we know nothing about that process as it is a top secret. It would be nice to know how many votes it takes to win these awards.

Also I'm not implying that SC's artists are not worthy of all these awards, as stated before I have no problems with works selected not being worthy of the award - I have never seen that, but it seems that the SC artists in the show by sheer numbers seem to dominate the awards given.

And I have nothing against the works selected, they're all good and in full disclosure I promoted Kristi Ryba's work in our March issue because she's our Queen of the *Carolina Arts* Facebook page, She won that title with a work that was in her ArtFields' installation which was on our cover and got over 7,500 views. But I can tell you this - I and *Carolina Arts* have no connection or influence with this year's ArtFields jurors or any jurors - most likely they won't even know who or what *Carolina Arts* is.

I know SC artists, I've been dealing with them for over 30 years and I don't think they're going to like the changes made during this year's ArtFields. Oh there will be some who love the change and think their odds of winning have gone up. Many will wonder how good their chances of winning are if they are not represented by Wim Roefs or what their chances of winning an award if he doesn't like their kind of art.

Artists who live in the other 11 states

are probably wondering what their odds of winning are too. And, I think it's a long shot - still possible - anything is possible, but the numbers say a lot. When 55 - 60% of the competition's artists are coming from SC, the event takes place in SC, and the majority of voters are from the Pee Dee area of SC.

Every year staff members of ArtFields make trips to recruit artists from other states to enter the ArtFields' competition, but I don't see much results from those trips other than a lot of fun for those who make them. It's a nice perk for those staff people, but the money it costs could be more effective in recruiting more artists.

Plus, if you haven't participated in this event you should know it's not inexpensive to participate in ArtFields. For many who enter juried shows all over the country it's probably no big deal, but for others entering installations which take several days to put up and just as many to take down - you may have hotel and transportation cost involved.

Let's just look at Kristi Ryba's entry which she valued at \$30,000. She took a \$5,000 hit on winning the Second Place award of \$25,000. Remember these top four awards are purchase awards in that ArtFields is taking ownership of these works and all rights to them. Her installation consisted of nine paintings, a bunch of furniture and related accessories. She was lucky she was only coming from Charleston to Lake City to present her entry, what if she lived in Miami, FL, or Richmond, VA? What would her transportation and hotel expenses be?

One of my early suggestions was for Lake City to start an artist adoption program where they matched locals with artists coming from afar. If Lake City is embracing this new art destination concept, just think how wonderful it would be to host an artist for the duration of the event. Without something like that the advantage will always be in favor of local artists or artists who live near by.

In 2018 at least seven artists who lived outside of SC received a \$1,500 or \$1,000 award for their efforts in entering this event. That might have been a break even point for many of them. The 378 other artists who showed work at ArtFields got an experience. I'm sure they'd like to know how many votes they got, if any. For some artists that's enough - just to be accepted into the event, and to have some exposure for their work, but to others a little more seasoned - they make calculations about chances of winning or the embarrassment of not winning, cost involved in participating, and value of exposure to the Lake City audience.

One of the other things that bothered me this year is the uptick in boasting about things that just are not true. ArtFields has always had a problem with presenting themselves in an over bloated manner, using words like Epic Event, Life-Changing Awards, and Masterpieces, which should come from others reviewing the event - not the organizers.

They bragged in press reports that ArtFields' new TRAX Visual Art Center, totalling 5,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space was the largest art venue in SC. That's a bold lie, they couldn't even out match the Florence County Museum in Florence, SC, Just a few miles away.

Why do they feel the need to make such false claims? Is it to attract entries from places that won't know that's a false statement?

I wish they could live up to the reality that yes it's great that a small town in SC has decided to use the visual arts to help revitalize their community, but it doesn't compare to the art communities that already exist in SC in much larger cities with much more to offer visitors.

In the first year ArtFields paid a Columbia, SC, firm to come up with an attendance figure which came right out of a hat since this is not a ticketed event - how did they come up with that figure? They're not the only folks to do that - for a decade the Spoleto Festival USA said

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it attracted 100,000 people to SC to get funding from the state tourism department. One year I called the box office to see how many tickets they sold and they said 60,000. Which would mean 40,000 were crashing the gates as everything at Spoleto is a ticketed event. And when you figure that no one who attends Spoleto goes to just one event the figure gets lower and then factor in how many people who live in Charleston go to events the number can get real small. But once the media has that phrase down, they just keep repeating it, until some wise guy like me challenges them on it.

In a *Florence Morning News* article Darla Moore Foundation President and chief executive officer Marion Fowler boasted in a speech to the Florence Rotary Club that 30,000 people attended this year's event - a jump in 10,000 from previous years. Where did that number come from other than a dream he had one night? He also said that the Jones-Carter Gallery in Lake City was Smithsonian-certified, which is not true. I called the Smithsonian organization and they knew of no classification of "Smithsonian-certified". The gallery has been approved to show a couple of exhibits that came from the Smithsonian, but they would have to go through a much more rigorous process to become a Smithsonian approved facility - much like many larger art Museums.

As someone who has been covering the visual art community in SC and later the Carolinas for 30 years, I just can't let stuff like that go by with out questioning it and standing up to whether it's true or not. I don't expect newspaper reporters with a few years experience and little knowledge of the overall visual art community in SC or even the region to know when someone make statements like that to know they are true or not, but I would hope that maybe their eyes rolled a little when thinking that Lake City would have larger facilities that Florence would - especially in light of the Florence County Museum opening just a few years ago.

But apparently the *Florence Morning News* and its paper in Lake City have decided to work for Darla Moore or a least

not go up against her money in reporting facts about Lake City more than just print what they are feed from ArtFields.

I myself am not happy about having to deal with ArtFields in this way as this commentary is giving them more coverage than any other publication, except for the *Florence Morning News*. Maybe not the coverage they would like, but in the past I was one of the event's biggest cheerleaders, until they turned to the dark side.

And, I'm not telling artists who have little opportunities to enter works in juried shows in SC, not to enter ArtFields - that's a decision they need to make for themselves. I just want them to be informed and counter statements made by ArtFields that are not true to draw them in.

In the past our publication has stood up against the SC Arts Commission, City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs, the Spoleto Festival USA, and critics of people trying to tell the good people of Barnwell, SC, that they didn't have a right to determine what could be shown in their exhibit space. So, we're used to speaking truth to power. And paying the price.

And, it's not just my concerns. I hear complaints from many artists who do not and can not stand up to the powers that be about policies and unfair practices. They know what will happen to their careers if they do. They've seen it in the past and the lesson has been learned. Go along to get along. But, they know they can speak to me and express their complaints and no one will ever know who they are.

You wouldn't believe how many times people in power always say, "well this is just you complaining, we don't hear from anyone else". What a surprise. And when I say that many more are not happy - they always ask - "who?" As if I'm going to turn over a list so they can go after them.

The bottom line here is that ArtFields continues to have problems of creditability and even more after this last event. I wish they would clean up their act for the good of the overall SC visual art community. They'd be better off if they did. But knowing the people in charge in Lake City - I'm not holding my breath.

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