

Charleston Artist Guild

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Charleston Crafts Cooperative Gallery in Charleston, SC, Celebrates 30th Anniversary

Charleston Crafts Cooperative Gallery celebrated its 30th Anniversary in May of 2019. Charleston Crafts is a cooperative Arts and Crafts gallery located in downtown Charleston, SC, at 161 Church Street. Charleston Crafts is open 7 days a week from 10am - 6pm.

Charleston Crafts began 30 years ago, in 1989, as a part of the Piccolo Spoleto Festival and currently features 44 local and regional South Carolina artists in a variety of traditional and contemporary art and craft media, including clay, woodworking, jewelry, glass, photography, fiber, metal, paper, polymer, and leather. Over the years, Charleston Crafts has been a springboard for over 315 artists.

A cooperative gallery, Charleston Crafts is owned and operated by its exhibiting members. Each juried member is an equal partner and shares the responsibility of operating the business. It is the only cooperative arts gallery in the Charleston area. The main focus of Charleston Crafts is to sustain a viable gallery for artists to consistently market their work. Experienced craft artists have been able to exhibit and sell their work while emerging artists have a safe platform to mature and let their careers flourish.

With deep roots in the Lowcountry, Charleston Crafts has been a very important part of the local community. The gallery and its members have helped to educate the community in schools, by hosting art shows and through participation in various events that have touched many lives. The co-op has been in its current location at 161 Church Street for 11 productive years, since 2008, and is a short walk from the historic Charleston City Market.

A Deeper Look at Charleston Crafts' 30
Year History

Who would have thought that the brain child of Stephanie Lewis Robertson and Beth Molaro, Charleston Crafts, would be alive and well after 30 years of business in Charleston. They gathered 50 traditional and contemporary craft artists for their first juried show as an offering of Piccolo Spoleto in May of 1989. The Water Works Building Garage off George street was used for two months. Handmade paper invitations created by the participating artists were sent out to announce the opening. The amazing success of this effort spurred the group on to continue beyond this first sale. A board was created, bylaws were written and the basic structure was formed which still exists today.

With a lot of spunk and very little financing the group moved to another space in September of that ill-fated year. They worked diligently to furnish and paint this new space. The gallery was painted a "puce" color because the paint price was right... aka free. One week after opening the city of Charleston was devastated by Hurricane Hugo. The new space was ruined. But most of the work was saved by the clear thinking of Mary Wichmann and other members who took the work to their homes for safe keeping. Losing this new space actually turned into an opportunity for Charleston Crafts to form a solid group, gain business experience and save profits. They moved back to the garage on George Street for the next two years. With the leadership of Suzzie Demeral the group took a giant leap of faith and opened their doors at 38 Queen Street.

The original focus of the group was to support artists as well as educate the community in schools, shows and community events. Constructing group sculpture projects and group clay workshops helped bond the members together. Some of the challenges over the years have been maintaining

membership and staying fluid to meet the needs of the artists. Eventually the main focus was to sustain a viable gallery for artists to consistently market their work.

When the Queen Street location was sold, the group again had to find a new home. 87 Hassell Street housed the gallery for the next seven years. However, being on a quiet side street proved to be too quiet when the bottom dropped out of the economy in the recent years. When discretionary income is endangered, buying art is one of the first things to go. Basically they had two choices: close the store or take another giant leap of faith, pay even more rent, move to a busier location and then see if closing was inevitable. Fortunately, they were rewarded for this effort with enough sales to continue and flourish in their new location on Church Street in 2008. With the fearless leadership of Anna Ruggerio and Caroline Sandlin, all our members worked to create this new store.

Keeping the store afloat financially has constantly been a challenge. The Piccolo Spoleto Outdoor Craft Show gate fees helped provide funds to keep the gallery open for many years. Nina Liu, artist and owner of Nina Liu and Friends Gallery, which has closed, gave an initial vote of confidence to the group as well as financial support. The Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs initially provided grant money and helped facilitate the acquisition of their George Street garage location at a time when craft art was struggling for recognition in the Charleston Arts community.

Throughout the years the goal has been to have high level of both traditional and fine craft. The struggle between keeping the doors open and representing fine quality work has been a continual challenge.

Each member of the group is a South Carolina resident. Charleston Crafts currently has 42 working members. Each member is an equal partner and shares the responsibility of operating the business. Being in a cooperative is a constant learning experience. Collaboration and compromise are needed for continued success. Members share ideas, business acumen, organizational management and survival skills for artists in today's changing art market. As individuals the artists could not have their own shops, but as a group they are continuing to succeed and have a market place for our handmade high quality crafts.

The good news is: Everybody is an equal owner. The bad news is: Everybody is an equal owner. Each member brings a different personality and skill set to the table. Over the past thirty years they have shared some crazy times!

One member painted a wall in the Queen Street store dark teal green. This threw many members into a tizzy! One suggested name for the cooperative group was: Charleston Area Crafts Artists or "CA - CA". This is fondly remembered by the "CA-CA Roach" cake brought to a pot luck dinner.

When at the last minute, due to illness, Mayor Riley could not attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new Church Street Store opening, no one knew what to do! However, Alethia Manigault, one of their basket makers, suggested her cousin could come to our rescue. Her cousin??? He did indeed show up, on very short notice and was a huge hit! But of course, he was Jonathan Greene!

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WELLS GALLERY



Michael Reibel & Russell Jewell



July 5th & 6th

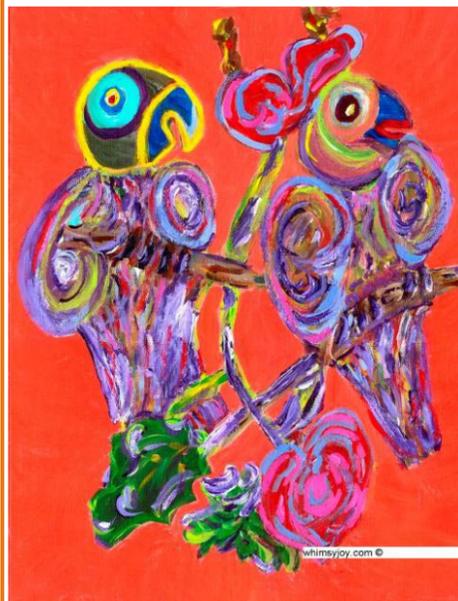
Please join us July 5th & 6th for a live painting event and show of new works with oil painter, Michael Reibel, and watercolorist, Russell Jewell. 1-6pm each day

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So be really Nice and Give us a Treat
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