



Simpatco Gallery

AN INTERNATIONAL DESTINATION FOR ART LOVERS

The Charleston Gallery Association provides collaborative muscle to the region's rapidly expanding arts community

by CHRISTINA ANDREWS / photography by HOLGER OBENAU



Robert Lange Studios

AS FOLKS FROM THE REGION WELL KNOW, Charleston is now one of the top destination vacation spots in the United States. Scores of tourists from all over the world come to enjoy its beautiful scenery and beaches, soak up the rich history of the region and experience this community's thriving performing and visual arts, all while being pampered at world-class hotels and savoring the city's amazing and varied cuisine. The well-heeled tourists who flock here seem to have this in common: *They love art.*

There are many things that draw artists to a particular region, but generally, the aesthetic is the first and primary draw. Charleston enjoys beautiful weather, varied and intriguing architecture and interior design, opulent gardens and landscaping, as well as spectacular natural scenery. This inspiring setting, plus Charleston's congenial and arts-appreciative residents and its renowned educational institutions, provide fertile ground for artists, artisans and those in the performing arts.

"The Charleston art community is now one of the most vibrant in the United States, ranked alongside New York City and Santa Fe, both in terms of quality and variety of art styles, but also in terms of the number of thriving galleries and artists active in the region," touts Jennie Fili, Charleston Gallery Association's (CGA) president. Fili and her fellow CGA board members describe their gallery community as diverse, colorful, accessible, "cutting-edge" and above all *collaborative*. "In some parts of the country, there is

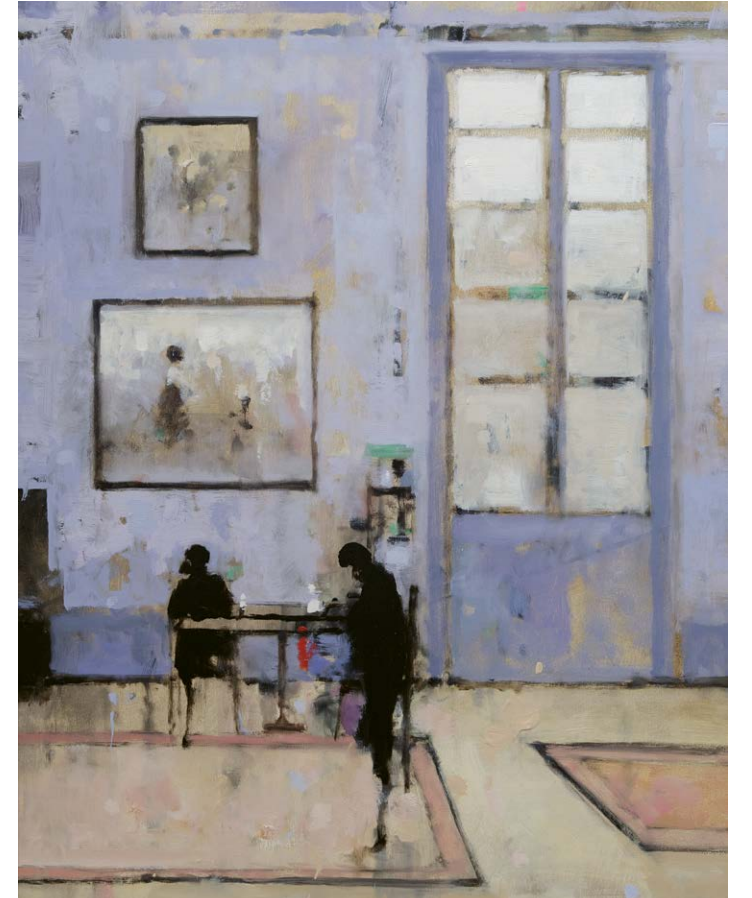
cutthroat competition between neighboring galleries. As a result, patrons often miss the gallery that most speaks to their tastes and sensibilities," says Fili. "Our association nurtures collaboration and applauds diversity in style and medium, and we hear time and again that when a client is not finding what they seek at a particular gallery, staff will direct them to a neighboring gallery that has what they are looking for. I like to call this 'Southern hospitality comingling with the arts.'"

For those unfamiliar with Charleston's art community, be they residents or international travelers, please know there is much to be enjoyed here. Members of the Charleston Gallery Association have studios that feature sculpture, handblown glass, ceramics, oil and acrylic paintings, watercolors, drawings in a variety of mediums, photography and fine art prints, mixed media, jewelry, murals and digital art forms. There is something for everyone. Styles represented include realism, contemporary, abstract, landscape and folk art, with some galleries offering historical pieces. While much of the art represented is created by regional artists, many galleries also feature works from artists of national and international renown.

There are many ways to partake in Charleston's art scene. Locals enjoy the CGA's First Friday Artwalks that take place monthly from 5 to 8 p.m. For this event, select galleries, all within walking distance of one another in Downtown Charleston, stay open into the evening. Each gallery celebrates this event in a different way:

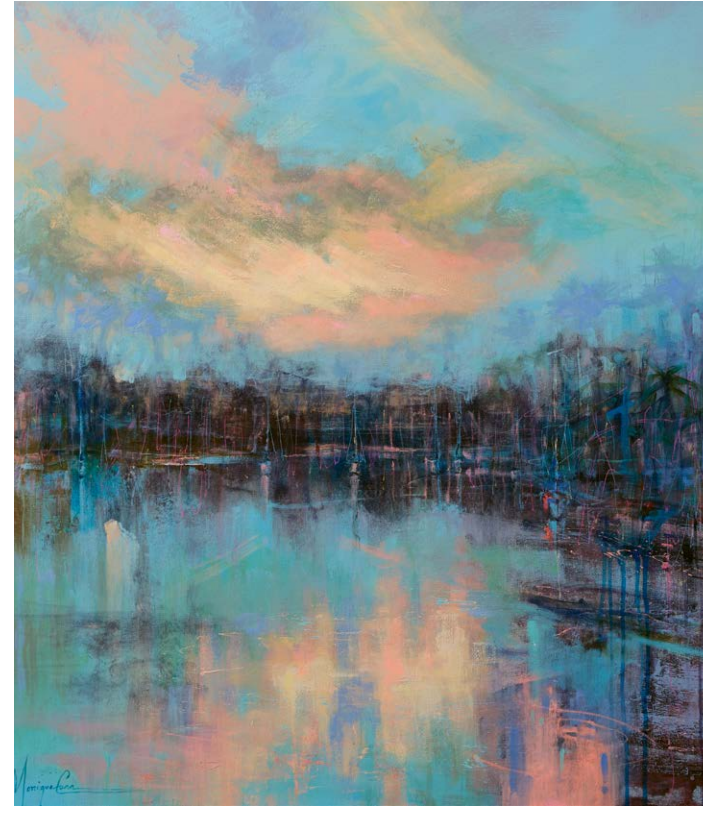


top: Helena Fox Fine Art
bottom: Robert Lange Studios



top left: Edward Dare Gallery, top right: Principal Gallery Charleston
bottom left: Helena Fox Fine Art, bottom right: Principal Gallery Charleston





left: Simpatico Gallery
right: Edward Dare Gallery

some offer bubbles and nibbles, others have artists painting live, while some galleries sponsor a themed exhibit. Artwalks are a great excuse to meet up with friends and enjoy cocktails and dinner at a nearby restaurant after gallery hopping. Experiencing art invites lively conversation *and* you and your friends may find yourselves taking home a new painting or sculpture at the end of an evening!

Many of Charleston's art lovers travel from long distances, having caught wind of the region's art treasures through friends or in travel guides. The emergence of this art-centric tourism has helped grow Charleston's art scene to what it is today. There are now over 40 galleries in the downtown area alone, with an additional seven in the outlying regions of Charleston: Mount Pleasant, Daniel Island, Sullivan's Island, Isle of Palms and Kiawah Island. This growth and the quality of the galleries has not gone unnoticed by major publications, including *Christie's International*, *Culture Trip*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Fodor's*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Travel & Leisure* and the *Washington Post*. Those who now visit the region specifically to see art often blend gallery outings with historic tours and museum visits, beach outings and sampling the area's exquisite cuisine. Affluent art travelers/buyers will not be disappointed by Charleston's accommodations, which are world-class, stylish, luxurious and dripping with Southern hospitality. *Travel & Leisure* offers a definitive guide to the region's hotels, which will put you close to all of the coveted downtown galleries and beach resorts.

Since 2015, the Charleston Gallery Association has helped to bring community to this diverse collection of art venues and has acted as a center point from which tourists and locals can explore options and plan outings. The CGA website offers gallery descriptions with representative photos of their artwork, phone-friendly/printable maps of gallery locations, and it is a hub for special art event announcements. From its inception, the CGA has aspired to make Charleston an international art tourism destination,

and as this mission was achieved, tourism has strengthened and enriched the galleries and artists who live in the region.

Charleston's art roots run deep, and art in the region continues to flourish and expand. In the early part of the 20th century, the region was home to many internationally prominent artists, and even today it continues to attract top talent. Charleston's art royalty includes the likes of Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, William Melton Halsey, Alfred Huffy, Elizabeth O'Neill Verner, Mary Whyte, West Fraser, Anna Heyward Taylor, John C. Doyle, Shepard Fairey, Robert Lange, Hirona Matsuda, Jill Hooper, John Duckworth, Fletcher Williams III, Jim Booth and Johnathan Green, to name but a few. Even Beeple (aka Mike Winkelmann), one of today's most renowned and gifted digital artists, calls Charleston home and recently opened a 50,000+ square foot gallery/workspace on Daniel Island.

CGA's talented board of directors includes Jennie Fili, president; Griffith Britton, vice president; Cynthia Miles treasurer; and Molly Clishom, secretary. The Charleston Gallery Association encourages all who love the region to support the artists and galleries that have helped create the beautiful and aesthetically rich fabric that is Charleston. *

Christina Andrews is a freelance writer from the Napa Valley who specializes in personal and business bios, food and wine, visual arts, music, hospitality, the event industry, community interest stories, obituaries and political satire.

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