



SOUTH CAROLINA

Artists

by Mary Ann Hutcheson

"THE TRUE BEAUTY OF ORIGINAL ART IS TO VIEW IT IN PERSON"



ALEXANDRA

Alexandra White, coordinator for the South Carolina Artists Group, assembled the group in 2010. As the daughter of an artist, she learned how to use oil paints when she was still “just a kid.” She accompanied her mother to oil-painting classes and art festivals.

“I’ve been doing art since the age of four,” she says, her easy smile conveying the joy in her memory.

Early on, Alexandra found that she related better to concepts and subjects in color. In math, the numbers appeared to her as nothing more than chalk marks scratched along a chalkboard.

“I’m a 30-year, midcareer artist,” she says, “so I’ve been doing it for a long time. I’ve always done my art, even while traveling, getting my degree and having a family.”

A professional visual artist, Alexandra received her fine arts degree from Boston University, with a minor in psychology. Throughout her life, like many artists, she has supplemented her income by working numerous jobs. Artists’ side jobs are similar to those of actors, who wait tables or work sales to help pay the bills.

Alexandra’s love of art was the seed for the formation of the South Carolina Artists Group. Soon after arriving in Lexington, she began a search for other local artists. When she learned that the area featured a wealth of artists, she wondered, “Why aren’t we all hanging around together?”

From that seed emerged the South Carolina Artists group.

Business and Art, a Successful Merge

Our interview took place at a popular Lexington business, The Haven Coffee House on Main Street in Lexington. Along the side wall hung an array of lovely local artwork. Attached to each piece, small tags displayed the name of the artist, a price, and contact information.

Too often, we allow these treasures to fade into the background as we chat with friends, enjoy our coffee and sweets, or catch up on computer work. We may see something we’d like to buy but decide instead to put that investment toward something less “frivolous,” an instinctive habit for many of us.

The Haven is one of other local businesses that exhibit their artwork, like The Landbank Lofts, Art at L.C.A.B. (Lexington County Administration Building), Musician Supply, 14 Carrot Whole Foods, and The Pitter Platter.

It is simple for an artist to become an active member. The website provides all the information you’ll need (there is a reasonable \$55/year membership fee). Because the group is not-for-profit, there are no charges or hidden fees. Individual memberships are the primary source of funding to provide maintenance for the group, like printing, website maintenance, and more. Everything is run by volunteers, including event and rotation committees to make sure artwork is installed correctly and rotated.

The group’s members provide emotion-

al support and encouragement to fellow artists, while learning proper exhibiting techniques and the best ways to promote an understanding of art appreciation.

The Lexington County Administration building is a prime example of how connections take place between businesses and art in a growing community. Alexandra worked for a year, researching, networking, educating, and meeting with council members and administrators. The result was the county council’s unanimous agreement for incorporating the Artists group to be shown in its building. A \$26,000 art-hanging system was approved and installed at a secure location in the building to keep artwork safe. The South Carolina Artists group manages all art in the Lexington County Administration building.

Alexandra says, “In this way, we give back to the community by providing our art, free of charge, to view. All we ask is that people be involved and take the time to view the art.”

Alexandra believes it is important that artists think of their art as a business. The joy of honing the business component of their passion lies in a close community with other artists.

Their group runs the gamut from new and emerging artists to longtime professional artists, some of whom join to reconnect with their artist community. They attend lunches, meetings, and events together. Mentoring is provided, and members gain access to the different business locations. They learn how to tag their work, create a professional art exhibit, operate sales, do online promotion, and create posters and fliers - in short, how to network their business.

Because marketing and sales are not taught in any kind of a fine arts program, the Artists group provides specific guidelines, and they teach the skills of how to promote, market, and sell art.

“Original art is alive; it speaks to the soul.”

Local artists and group members, Annette Rivers and Ginny Merrett arrived and soon joined the discussion.

Both agree that meeting other artists and their sense of community are what drew them to the group.

Annette, a lifelong artist, believes her work has only improved with age and maturity.



Alexandra White, Annette Rivers, Ginny Merett

She says, “I find that a lot of people have never dealt with original art for the public. Maybe it’s a little scary for them.

“If you look around here,” she continues, “there are pictures that probably cost less than a pair of shoes. What I always recommend is if you’ve never even thought about buying art, just start small. Buy one piece, take it home, hang it up, and see what it feels like. I think it gives your home a better atmosphere; it makes it classier. Original art in your home makes it real. It shows you have personality and enjoy more than cheap, mass-produced prints on plastic and cardboard, sold in big box stores.

“If you buy locally, you are participating in community growth. It also makes a wonderful conversation point in your home and brings a life and energy that stays with the painting. You will never get that with a print. A print is a thing; just a flat object. Original art is alive; it speaks to the soul. When you start small, it could be the start of a collection, then you become an art collector after your second one! It’s a wonderful addiction.”

If you don’t have the exact amount the day you see something you’d like to buy, ask the artist if he or she takes installments, maybe pay \$50/month. Many artists take monthly payments with no interest, as trust for payments. An artist will reserve it for you until it’s paid. Another possible option for artists and their buyer is PayPal, which has an instant pay program.

Ginny Merett was an art educator in Lexington County and has been doing art in retirement for about four years. The artists group met her wish to be proficient at showing her work and reaching out to the community. As a retired art teacher, she needed to find her niche in the art community. Ginny always had a studio in her house, even when she taught, as do most artists. She knew she would have additional uninterrupted time

in retirement to devote more time to it. How fortunate for her young students to have had a talented artist teaching them art in the classroom.

Most artists realize that their art is not going to pay their bills or be their full-time job. In turn, professional artists are able to take the info that SC Artists teach them (becoming a legacy and getting their names out) and get into nice galleries where they will be seen. Networking is one of the most important aspects for an artist.

Trying to instill the beauty in the networking is important.

“We don’t just have retirees in our group. We have artists from 25-95 years of age,” Alexandra says. Her group is able to spark one another’s passion.

Ginny and Annette chime in: “We learn from each other.”

The Brookings Institute research tells us, “The arts challenge us with different points of view, compel us to empathize with ‘others,’ and give us the opportunity to reflect on the human condition.”

Maybe it is time to really look at the art we see on the walls of our businesses and appreciate the beauty it brings to our lives - and maybe even bring a piece into our homes.



Why Art Matters

As young students, many of us loved our art classes. It was a place of freedom, where we were encouraged to find our soul and express it through form or color. We didn’t have to memorize anything or fill in the blanks. We loved our first crayon boxes, decided which were our favorite colors, and experimented with drawings we could create with them. Our first readers were filled with colorful, whimsical characters, some in cartoon form, others in exact detail. Art connected us to the world around us. Our parents hung our prizes on the refrigerator and smiled with pride at our creative accomplishment.

The world of computers and graphic design came along, and we seem to have left living art - and the idea of spending money on it - behind. There is no better time than the present to reconnect than now. The South Carolina Artists group and our local businesses are providing the chance for us to view, and possibly purchase, live art. It’s worth our time to check it out. ■