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GALLERY GUIDE

Where to find fine art in the Bluegrass

BY DAVID MINTON

There is a decidedly mistaken national perception about what kinds of art are most prevalent here.

Yes, fine crafts and folk art are plentiful. But mainstream fine arts rule.

Consider scouting out the following venues, in and around Lexington:

DOWNTOWN LEXINGTON

Ann Tower Gallery, in the Downtown Arts Center, 141 East Main Street. This roomy gallery, near the geographic center of town, has two floors. The emphasis is on decorative painting, various styles of fine art sculpture, and charming folk art. Tower does handle some top-end photography and ceramics, as well. Her large stable of artists, most connected in some way to the University of Kentucky, work mainly within academic guidelines: in contemporary styles firmly rooted in art history, often in serial formats or "bodies of work," and with strict professional standards developed in M.F.A. programs. The Tower Gallery usually has two shows going at once: a solo or two-person exhibit on one level, with a large and varied group show on the other. Some of Lexington's most-publicized artists are associated with this place exclusively. (859/425-1188)

Miller Fine Art & Framing, 501 East High Street. Owner Deborah Miller has six or seven exhibits a year, in addition to a "standard stock" of original works by regional artists. Miller is the only gallery in Lexington

devoted exclusively to Central Kentucky artists. Most of the exhibits feature paintings only, a rarity at a time when museums and many galleries have turned to installation art, video art, folk art and other "non-painting mediums. Landscapes and pictures of urban scenery hang side by side with mystical-realist visions, post-modernist expressionist art and, occasionally issues-oriented subjects. Miller Fine Art has institutionalized an annual "Nude Show" of figurative paintings, and an annual exhibit devoted to Henry Faulkner, a legendary Lexington painter/poet and colorful personality who was killed in a car crash in the early '80s. (859/254-0402)

Cerlan Gallery, 522 West Short. Owner Gayle Cerlan doesn't take too many chances with the shows she mounts. Artists she exhibits have to have a high profile, either regionally or nationally, before they are allowed into her gallery. Recently on view was a major selection of works by the late, great Howard Finster (a Georgia outsider artist and Christian proselytizer who called himself a "man of visions").

The 170-plus year old downtown building has been tastefully renovated, with attention paid to retaining an inner-city residential feel that softens the museum-like settings. The galleries, on two floors, are small enough to seem intimate; the natural light in the upstairs rooms is glorious on sunny days. (859/233-7284)

Clark Art & Antiques, 192 North Broadway. Walk into this art-and-antiques shop and you may find centuries-old Hindu icons and Buddhist sculptures, antique furniture ranging from very fine to rustic, Rookwood pottery, stylish silverwares and 20th century American cultural items (example: a "space-age" TV straight out of a Jetsons cartoon). On any given day, you might catch owner Tom Clark unloading items just purchased at an estate sale or restoring an Edwardian dresser or Victorian wardrobe. In addition to antiques and artsy novelties, there is some contemporary and traditional fine art. Often, Clark has some of the weirdest, quirkiest folk art to be found in Lexington. (859/361-2147)

Gallerie Soleil, 363 West Short Street. The nature of this place has changed in the last few years. Lately, sex and sexual issues have become major exhibit themes (though they are not the only themes). Some of the people in charge of this co-op consider these shows "edgy," and some local journalists treat the fare as merely humorous or decadently outrageous, but be warned: sometimes the intent is to shock you. There are seven studios in this renovated walk-up, so you can go past the featured exhibits and straight into the studios to see works ranging from post-modernist paintings to serious materials-oriented works. (859/233-0890)

Other downtown galleries include:

The Living Arts & Science Center, in historic Kinkead House, 362 North Martin Luther King Blvd. The center's focus is on art education and cultural diversity. Wholesome but challenging family-oriented exhibits can be counted on, ranging from recent displays of African art to an explanatory look at process-oriented digital art. Shows of art by children and students, from Kentucky and around the world, are sometimes shown. Occasionally, shows with social themes are mounted, such as The Face Of AIDS, a photo documentary "humanizing people living with HIV." The center has a "science room" for children and an art library that anyone can use. (859/252-5222)

Loudoun House, 209 Castlewood Drive, is a Gothic Revival villa built in 1852 as the home of Francis Key Hunt and now the Lexington Art League headquar-

ters. Art league administrators have instituted a series of juried national exhibits to ensure high-quality viewing experiences for visitors. Most are theme shows, the two most popular being The Nude, every year in January, and Masterpieces of Maturity (works by artists over 50) every May. The building is also used for lectures, workshops and classes. (859/254-7024)

ArtsPlace Gallery, 161 North Mill Street. Every kind of art imaginable by artists living in Fayette and contiguous counties. The renovated Beaux Arts building houses The Lexington Arts & Cultural Council administrative offices: a good place to pick up official information about the local arts scene and maps showing where galleries are. (859/255-2951)

Artists' Attic, 401 West Main Street in Victorian Square (top floor). Studios housing artists who work in a variety of styles and media, plus a gallery space for invitational shows of mostly local artists. Much amateur work, though quirky and spirited. Lots of portraits and florals. (859/254-5501)

Blue Note: The Lexington Art League hosts monthly Fourth Friday receptions with live music on the fourth Friday of every month. Area restaurants offer food and beverages. There is a charge for these events. Call 859/254-7024 for information.

Wingspan Gallery, 191 Jefferson Street. This gallery doubles as a private home. Exhibitions are by invitation only and most of the work is by middle-of-the-road independent artists who fall somewhere between university professors and amateurs. Most of the shows are offbeat and spunky, and the owner will treat you like family. (859/252-7000)

The Atelier 165 Saunier Street, behind the Lexington Opera House, is a combination commercial metal shop/fine art studio opened by Michael Maxson and Stacey Chinn in 200. Pay them a visit if you want to see metal being cut, welded or otherwise manipulated to various ends. Stand back when the sparks start to fly! A small gallery space has been set aside at the front of the shop, separate from the industrial clutter and creative flux. (859/455-9955)

NEAR DOWNTOWN

The University Of Kentucky Art Museum, Rose Street and Euclid Avenue, in the Singletary Center for the Arts. The UK Art Museum is not a well-heeled museum, but, as university museums go, it's got some art worth seeing in it. Due to lack of space, the permanent collection has to be shown in rotating increments. Thanks to active curators, there is usually a selection on view with some knock-outs included. Director Kathy Walsh-Piper has been making an effort to get more traveling exhibits in that appeal to wide segments of the population. Generous donors, and intelligent acquisitions of prints and photographs by staff members, have assured that interesting gems by some of art history's stars are part of the fare, which includes ethnic objects, textiles, regional fine art and folk art.

(859/257-5716)

Note: Finding parking around the UK campus can be a nightmare, so, if you are staying in a downtown hotel or motel, consider taking a cab or a moderately long hike on foot.

New Editions Gallery, 811 Euclid Avenue.

Though New Editions is primarily a source of decorator art and arty household items, a small selection of fine art is kept on the walls. Most of it is easy on the eyes and not hard to relate to: no message art, no political statement or religious imagery, no nudes, no social issues. But it is not totally innocuous. Much of it goes beyond facile design, and the lack of edgy content is often made up for with heartwarming sentiment or elegantly abstract beauty. (859/266-2766)

The Headley-Whitney Museum, 4435 Old Frankfort Pike in Fayette County, is Kentucky's finest decorative arts showplace. The Headley is, in fact, the only museum in the state dedicated solely to decorative arts.

Recent exhibits have featured Tiffany glassware, Art Nouveau ceramics, Victorian silverware, and fashion footwear by prestigious designers in the shoe industry. The museum owns a fine selection of Chinese porcelains dating back to antiquity, which is on permanent display. A very classy place that should not be missed. (859/255-6635)

IN THE REGION (SHORT DRIVES)

Heike Pickett Gallery, 110 Morgan Street, Versailles. Owner Heike Pickett has, in her 25+ years in business, been very selective about the artists she handles. Absolute professionalism is a must, whether the particular artist works in a style of explosive expressionism or strictly controlled realism. The gallery's inventory is well rounded: fine stone and metal sculpture, ceramics, oils and acrylics, prints, collages, glass, paperworks and some few pieces of wood work.

Two small rooms at the front of this historic building house the main shows. A dining room doubles as a display area, where works can be seen in domestic settings. The shaded grounds serve as a sculpture garden. Pickett handles some work by internationally famous masters, including Brice Marden and Robert

Motherwell, so be sure to ask about work that is not on view in particular exhibits.

Note: Pickett has a satellite gallery 400 East Vine Street in Lexington, in the CMW architecture firm's headquarters. (859/233-1263)

Capital Gallery, 314 Lewis Street, in

Frankfort. This gallery has a very homey ambience, complete with a cat. (Don't try to pet him, he can be testy.) Owner Ellen Glasgow has a healthy exchange going with artists who work in Washington D.C., St. Louis and elsewhere. She brings their art here, and sends work by Kentuckians out of the state. Colorful, interpretive landscapes are the rule. Shows of still lifes, classical or unusual architecture, and outstanding ceramics by some of Kentucky's leading clay artists are also prevalent.

Capital Gallery is an outlet for hand-printed and hand-bound books made at the highly regarded Larkspur Press in nearby Monterey (north of Frankfort). Larkspur books are works of art in themselves; they feature writings by some of Kentucky's leading lights. (502 /223-2649)

TAKE A DAY TRIP TO BEREA

"The crafts capital of Kentucky" is home to the new 20,000 square foot Kentucky Artisan Center, just off I-

Blue Note: Most galleries and museums are closed on Mondays, so keep that in mind. It is best to call any given location first to find out what the hours are and if there are any admission charges.

75 at exit 77, as well as several fine arts galleries. Berea is about a 40-minute drive from Lexington, and there is enough to keep you busy for an entire day - or two. Among the many independent galleries are some standouts:

Contemporary Artifacts Gallery, 327 Chestnut Street. This studio/showcase, owned by porcelain artist Gwen Heffner, is where to find an extensive selection of unique clay work, from one-of-a-kind beads to fine teapots with international flair. Artists are from the region and from across the nation as well. Steel and forged iron sculpture, small art quilts and baskets are also kept on view. Contemporary Artifacts hosts some national shows. (859/986-1096)

Appalachian Fireside Gallery, 127 Main Street. Historical exhibits are the staple, but there are also original craft items. (859/986-9013)

KENTUCKY TRADITIONS

Two of the best places in the state to see equestrian art - one in town and one outside of town - are:

Cross Gate Gallery, 509 East Main Street, a classy place with a deceptive air of exclusivity about it. Ignore the false impression the mansion-like setting causes; just focus on the high-quality art by regional, national and European masters. Not all of the work is equestrian; there is contemporary and historical sporting art of various kinds, and some work with old-style high-culture themes, i.e. ballet and orchestra scenes. This is an independent retail gallery, so the work is for sale; but you'll need lots of cash to acquire any of it. (859/233-3856)

International Museum of the Horse, at the 1,200-acre Kentucky Horse Park, has been carving a place for itself as a venue for world-class equestrian exhibitions in the past two or three years. Y2K's Imperial China blockbuster, organized by museum officials and the Chinese government, featured 3,000 years' worth of Chinese art with the horse as a theme. Regular shows by members of the American Academy of Equine Artists and other prestigious horse-art groups can also be counted on. (859/233-4303)

There are two excellent sources for folk and outsider art near Lexington:

The Kentucky Folk Art Center, Morehead, 60 miles east of Lexington (off of I-64). KFAC is a repository of contemporary Appalachian folk art. Morehead State University started collecting folk art in 1985. The collection became so large that a nonprofit organization had to be founded to organize and care for the holdings. In 1997, the Kentucky Folk Art Center was established to house the 740-piece permanent collection.

Most of the items in the collection are traditional and stereotypically rural: simple but highly stylized carved animals, weirdly-ornate canes, holy-roller paintings that proselytize and naïve social commentary works. The center justifies its existence as an academic institution by providing educational materials for public perusal, including a seven-minute video about folk art. (606/783-2204)

The Kentucky Museum of Arts + Design, in Louisville at 715 West Main Street. Most of the artists who show here are "officially sanctioned" folksies who have found a mainstream for themselves through state-sponsored organizations and organized groups such as the Kentucky Guild of Artists & Craftsmen. The good thing about this gallery is that the range of traditional crafts is vast. There is some primitive, intuitive stuff; but most is very serious and fine craft, made by artisans who have spent lifetimes perfecting their skills. Baskets, beadworks, quilts, woodwork, glass, metal, leather, you name it. (502/589-0102)

**For more information
contact the Lexington Convention
and Visitors Bureau at 800-845-3959.**

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