Art Fairs Serve Up a Slice of Wisconsin!

Posted on Jul 16, Posted by Kathleen Vinehout, State Senator 31st District Category Wisconsin

This week, Senator Kathleen Vinehout writes about the slice of life in Wisconsin that can be seen in the work of Wisconsin artists. Kathleen includes links to upcoming events and the Wisconsin Tourism webpage that provides a complete listing of art and cultural events in the state.

MADISON - When I asked my sister about a cake for her birthday, she smiled and said, “I’d rather have pie … and art.” So we sat down to blueberry pie and then headed off to an art fair.

Wisconsin has over 215 art fairs. The diversity and creativity is limited only by Wisconsin ingenuity which I’ve decided is limitless!

There is no better way to see what a creative human mind and skilled hands can achieve than by observing art and speaking directly to the creators.

Art fairs are an opportunity for artists to find a home for items they fashioned. Often working through the winter to produce art, many artists spend the summer driving to art fairs to sell their wares.

There is something intimate and rare about the relationship between an artist, her cherished work, and the new owner who finds extraordinary delight in owning a splendid piece.

I attended the 55th Annual Art Fair on the Capitol Square which attracts 450 artists with another 120 or so artists “Off the Square”. The definition of art was broad and included textiles, jewelry, sculpture as well as paintings, photographs and prints. And I found art that stepped outside the boundaries of classification.

There were framed pictures of 3D vegetables and fruit that jumped right out of the frame; 3D mosaics made of individual tiles of ceramic and the life-sized metal moose sculpture that nodded its head at delighted patrons. Quite an addition to any Wisconsin garden!

Wisconsin art is a slice of Wisconsin life. The beauty of our state is reflected in the creative designs of the artists. For example the husband and wife team of Pfipsen Olivova Studios in River Falls used their inspiration from Mississippi River to create beautiful jewelry with the flowing lines of water.

Steve, a UW-RF graduate, met his lovely wife Katia when he was studying glassmaking in the Czech Republic. They merged their lives and created a successful artistic collaboration. They said “Wisconsin and its people inspire you to do art.”

A slice of Wisconsin life shows up again and again in the work of her artists; whether it be the shoreline of Lakes Superior and Michigan; the rolling hills of western Wisconsin or the city skylines of Milwaukee and Madison. Farm life reigns supreme: cows, barns, fields, chickens, cheese, fruit and vegetables…lots of vegetables. I could certainly see our love of gardening expressed through the eyes of the artists.

I was also impressed by the use of recycled materials. I saw sculptures made of scrap metals; creatures made of recycled tins; stained glass surrounded by old barn windows frames – complete with many layers of white wash; metal flowers made with old spoons; even clocks made of forks and spoons.

Artists from other states captured life in Wisconsin. Like the Florida man who said he knew more about our state than a lot of us. He used old junk toys to make 3D sculptures. He also collected images of Wisconsin icons, like the Mars Cheese Castle in Kenosha, “Hamburger Charlie” from Seymour and of course Bucky Badger, to create a collage any Wisconsinite would treasure.

If I've inspired you, be sure to visit the Stockholm Art Fair, July 20 from 10am to 5pm at the park along the river. You can also visit the Spirit of the St Croix Art Festival, September 21-22 in Hudson.

The Spirit of Wisconsin is alive among Native American artists who gather along Milwaukee's Lake front September 6-8 at the Indian Summer Festival – the state's largest Native American cultural event. You can find out more at www.indiansummer.org

Several fall art tours offer a glimpse into how Wisconsin artists bring art alive in their studios and galleries. The Fresh Art Tour in western Wisconsin is October 4-6 (www.freshart.org) and the Earth, Wood and Fire Artist Tour is October 26-27 (www.earthwoodandfiretour.com).

To learn more, try the state Department of Tourism website www.TravelWisconsin.com and click on the art and culture link. You will see Buffalo County's own Prairie Moon Sculpture Garden and Museum in Cochrane featured on Wisconsin's Tourism website!

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