

City announces this year's picks for Artists Row

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Salem — There will be some new faces as well as familiar ones when Artists Row reopens this weekend.

Competition was fiercer than ever this year to occupy one of the four small buildings at 24 Derby St., nestled between Front and Lafayette streets. The city typically gets five to seven applications each year for the seasonal artists' enclave, but this year it received about 15.

"We had more applicants this year than in the past two years put together. The word is getting out and there's a lot of interest," said Frank Taormina, of the Planning Department. "We tried to accommodate as many as artists as possible."

A collection of galleries and studios, Artists Row is sponsored by the city of Salem as a way of encouraging the arts community and also fostering retail growth in the downtown. Officials from the Planning Department and the Mayor's Office make the choice each year as to who will occupy the spots.

The Salem Arts Association (SAA) will return to its 900-square-foot space, and Mamadou Diop's Baobab Space again will house one of the stalls with Debra Crosby's A Quest Actors Studio.

New this year is A Guild of Artistic Sorts — GASworks, a collaboration of about 10 local artists from varying disciplines. Also new, in the fourth stall, is potter Bradley Backer's Impart Art, sharing space with textile artist Virginia Berry's YazBerry Fashion.

With so many artists and groups vying this time around for just a few spots, city officials had a tough time deciding who would make the cut.

"This year, unfortunately, there had to be some clear winners and losers. This year there was so much interest. It's a great thing, but at the same time it made it harder," Taormina said. "Making the final decision... was quite a process."

The organizers of Experimental Art Gallery & Studio, which occupied a stall for the last few years, did not apply this year, said Taormina, while the city did not choose to return the Theory studio, which was joined Artists Row in 2009 but won't be back this year.

Much of the hard choices were based on the city's desire to pack in as many artists as possible. Shared spaces and collaborative galleries won out, Taormina explained.

Artists get to use the space rent free, but throughout the season they have to maintain the stall, stay open during designated hours every week and offer special programs and performances — so the manpower offered by collaborations makes a difference when officials make their selections.

The influx of applications is also why the choices weren't made public until this week, shortly before Artists Row's soft opening this weekend. The artists' stalls were set to open Thursday, but there will be an official grand opening next weekend, which will coincide with the citywide Salem Arts Festival. (See below for details on the festival.)

The schedule for the season is the same as last year, which includes an extension of the hours on Thursdays so that Artists Row shares traffic with the Salem Farmers Market, which runs until 7 p.m. The artists and the city also work with the Lobster Shanty restaurant, next to Artists Row.

Newcomers on the Row

About 10 North Shore artists comprise A Guild of Artistic Sorts — GASworks, which formed specifically to find a home on Artists Row.

Like the SAA, GASworks' artists represent a variety of disciplines. Salem resident Dann Maurno, who's leading the group, said the members would display and give workshops on talents ranging from fine art and photography to leather craft and theater.

They'll also be working with the local band Merj, which Maurno described as "violin power rock," to teach an open-mike preparation workshop. And his wife, Sarah Maurno, an acting professor, will give a few workshops there on her own craft.

"[The city] only required we deliver 12 workshops or performances during the time, but we're asking, can we do 20, 25?" Maurno said,

The group is excited about being chosen for the season — “It’s a gas,” Maurono quipped — although they’ve been busy getting ready to open for the first time.

“Everyday we’re down there thinking something new to do,” he said. “For us, every brick has to be painted, every display has to be put up.”

In the fourth and smallest stall will be the shared studios of Backer and Berry. A recent transplant to Salem, Backer previously owned a paint-your-own pottery studio in Quincy for seven years. Visitors will be able to watch him work with his kiln, check out the pottery he creates and try their hand at the craft during workshops.

With her YazBerry Fashion, Berry creates one-of-a-kind purses, jewelry and clothing. She uses bold colors and intricate details to create pieces with a vintage flair, inspired in part by her travels around the world. She’ll offer classes on fashion design, basic sewing and costuming — plus some musical activities, as she’s also a musician.

Artists come home again

The SAA is returning for its third season at Artists Row. With dozens of members who work in a range of media, they host rotating monthly exhibits as well as retail and gallery offerings. The group’s first show of the season, opening this weekend, is “Fresh and Fruity,” which ties into the Salem Farmers Market, which will reopen in June. A reception for the show will be held Saturday, June 12, 4-7 p.m.

In addition to the monthly, themed exhibitions, the SAA will spotlight one member artist every few weeks. The first person featured will be glassworker Gary LaParl. (Learn more about the SAA and its activities, within and outside the Row, at saleartsassociation.org.)

Diop and Crosby have also shared their space on Artists Row for several years. Their stall again will feature Diop’s African art and crafts and Crosby’s acting classes and performances.

The pair also works together on the nonprofit A3D (African Development through Drum and Dance), which hosts CultureFest in Salem every summer.

FYI:

Artists Row stalls are open Thursday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, noon to 6 p.m. Some stalls may be open additional days or hours. Performances, exhibits, workshops and other events are held throughout the season, May 27 through Nov. 1. For details on programming, visit saalem.com/pages/artistrow.

Many of the artists involved in the Row are participating in the Salem Arts Festival and Salem Arts Walk, June 4-6. Learn more in the *Gazette’s* **Art News section** this week, and find further details at saalemartsfestival.com.

For more about the Salem Farmers’ Market, visit saalemfarmersmarket.org.

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