

Editorial COMMENTARY

by Tom Starland, Editor and Publisher

The Queen is Dead, Long Live the Queen!

We have a new Queen - a Cover Queen of *Carolina Arts*. Wan Marsh of Charlotte, NC, has set a new all time high for a post made on the *Carolina Arts* Facebook page. Some of you may have read the post I made at *Carolina Arts Unleashed* about this (<http://carolinaarts.com/wordpress/2014/06/08/carolina-arts-has-a-new-facebook-post-queen/>), but whether you have or haven't - there's more to the story there.

As of June 28, 2014, Wan Marsh's cover reached 7,440 people on Facebook. The "Carolina Arts" Facebook page only had about 2,290 likes at the time (we now have 2,381). So a lot of folks were seeing this cover from the 130 shares that post received. But success on Facebook doesn't necessarily translate into downloads (not right away). The June issue only received 79,331 downloads (pending the end of the month). I say only in comparison to other months (not during the summer) when not too long ago we had only a possibility of 10,000 readers, back when we printed the paper.

To give you an example of this, our April 2014 issue had 196,026 downloads, but on Facebook it only reached 3,342 people, with 76 shares, and 25 comments.

So the big question is - do we want downloads or shares. Well, we want both, but it's hard to compare Spring readers with Summer readers. Summer months have always been slow for us. But, more shares on Facebook can only lead to more downloads, as more people these days are discovering us through our Facebook exposure. Which really makes me angry.

I hate Facebook - mostly for the way it works or doesn't work. And, for all the

changes it keeps making - changes that make Facebook better for Facebook and not better for its users. But since it does lead to more exposure for *Carolina Arts* - I'll learn to live with it - or put up with it.

Now it should be noted that Wan Marsh took an active role in promoting her cover - which is a good thing for all artists to do. If we mention you on one of our Facebook pages (my personal one included) you should jump on the bandwagon and help spread that post around.

Our New Cover

This Month's cover - I know, another abstract, but it was the best we saw that fit the criteria for cover images. (Learn about that criteria at the link mentioned at *Carolina Arts Unleashed*.) Also, I'll add that the gallery and artist responded quickly, and had available high res images on hand that they could send us. That's very important.

I first saw this new body of work by Keith Spencer in an article we presented a month or so ago when he had a show at Skyuka Fine Art in Tryon, NC. I have no idea how this cover will do compared to last month - it's a hard act to follow, but it all depends on how social media works. It's not a competition - at least not to us, but we have to give our new Queen her due bragging rights.

Is It Winter Time Yet?

My calendar says Summer started a week or so ago, but we know differently. The official arrival of Fall will be a shocker too, but we knew what we were getting into when we all decided to stay here in the South. Even if you were born here - at some point you had a choice to

leave or stay.

I decided to leave my Winter hell back in 1974. From Michigan to South Carolina may be a 1,000 miles, but it's more than a change in distance - it's a cultural change. These days it's hard to see a difference in politics - Michigan and the Carolinas seem to have caught the same virus. But after 40 years of living in the South - I feel Southern Fried - some days literally.

Today, I'd be, and am considered an odd-ball in either place, as I'm a dyed in the wool - liberal.

But I do love our Southern Winters.

Single Page vs. Double Page

June was the first time we offered *Carolina Arts* in a single page and double page format - equally. Single page downloads were about double the number for double page downloads.

Enough About Our Paper

One evening this month while I was shutting down for the day I was checking Facebook as my last duty and I came across a post about a deal between an arts organization and the Greensboro, NC, newspaper. I could hardly believe what I was reading.

I shared that post and made this comment: "I wonder how much 70 articles about the arts (all the arts) are costing the folks in Greensboro? We do an average of 50 a month on just the visual arts. That comes to 5.8 articles a month about exhibits, music, dance, theatre, etc. What kind of coverage is that - about one article about an exhibit a month. And, they're getting paid to do that? I don't know who ArtsGreensboro is, but I bet they are a non-profit - meaning only the non-profits will see coverage. This is a bad deal and one that will make ArtsGreensboro a kingmaker in the arts community. Is it really better than nothing? And, yes - every newspaper will be putting their hands out to every art community to pay up or else."

Linda, my editor, pointed out that I should have said that the Greensboro

newspaper was agreeing to do 5.8 articles a month. I said our readers would get it, but they would not respond - they'd be too afraid to comment about something like that in public. And, I was right. There was little if no reaction to such a dangerous event for the arts in the Carolinas.

I found out that ArtsGreensboro is the new name and brand of the United Arts Council of Greater Greensboro - the local arts council. They made this deal with the *News & Record*, Greensboro's local newspaper.

In the article, Jeff Gauger, *News & Record* executive editor and publisher, writes: "In our agreement, the *News & Record* has committed to publishing at least 70 stories about local arts topics during the next year. That's 70 more stories than we would have published without this agreement."

So apparently this big city newspaper has agreed to be paid to produce 70 articles about groups supported by the arts council - for an undisclosed amount of money.

I can only assume that since the arts council is paying the tab - those articles will be positive in nature about their members. No bad reviews in Greensboro. Now that's a deal.

If I was a subscriber to the *News & Record*, I'd have to wonder who else is buying coverage in the paper. I know the high and mighty media doesn't like paying for stories, but I guess they don't mind being paid for coverage - by contract.

So after this word gets out, which will be the next newspaper asking to be paid for arts coverage? And, should I be asking myself how much we can get for our coverage of the visual arts in Greensboro? Should I cut off all coverage of any area until they pay up?

We're presenting 50 articles about the visual arts in this issue, 2 about exhibits in Greensboro, and many are about facilities that have never spent a dime with us by advertising. And this is a slow month. We only ask people to send us their press release by deadline for coverage in *Carolina Arts* - but, we love our supporters.

Rhett Thurman



Of a Feather

Oil on Wood

6 x 8 inches



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