

Sumter County Gallery of Art in Sumter, SC, Offers Works by Laura Spong & Sumter Artists' Guild



Work by Laura Spong

The Sumter County Gallery of Art in Sumter, SC, is presenting *Laura Spong: Once in a Green Moon* and the *Sumter Artists' Guild Winners Show*, on view through Feb. 16, 2018.

The Sumter County Gallery of Art is changing things up a bit for the January exhibitions, which have traditionally comprised the *SC Watermedia Society Traveling Exhibition* and the *Sumter Artists' Guild Winners Show*. We are excited that this temporary change (the SC Watermedia Society traveling exhibition will resume in 2019) allows us to present a solo exhibition of Columbia artist Laura Spong. Spong, who is 91 years young, is among South Carolina's best abstract artists.

Except for a few urban landscape scenes, still lives and figurative paintings, mostly done in the 1950s, Spong has always produced non-representational, Abstract Expressionist paintings. In the last several years, Spong has dramatically increased her reputation in South Carolina and beyond with a series of solo exhibitions and several group shows, including a retrospective at the University of South Carolina's McMaster Gallery.

Spong's work is in many important institutional collections including the South Carolina State Art Collection, Greenville County Museum of Art and the South Carolina State Museum as well as many private collections.



Work by Laura Spong

In an article in *The State* newspaper in 2016 on the eve of Spong's ninetieth birthday and an accompanying exhibition *Laura Spong at 90: Six Decades in Painting*, Erin Shaw writes: "Spong has been painting regularly since the 1950s. At nearly 90, she is the grande dame of Vista Studios, a slight yet spry woman who still paints five days a week, usually following a daily walk. Spong opined that, "I feel extremely fortunate that I'm still here and can do what I want to do."

Spong first became interested in art while taking a few drawing courses at Vanderbilt University in her home state of Tennessee. But after marrying, moving with her husband to Columbia and having six kids, life tended to get in the way of picking up a paintbrush. It wasn't until she retired in the late 1980s that she devoted all of her time to working as an artist.

Other than classes here and there,

Spong remains largely self-taught. Becoming a full-time artist in her 60s didn't allow time to train under an expert. And that's OK. "Had I had more training, I think I might have ended up painting like someone else," she said. "And the most important thing to me is to feel like I'm painting like myself. I did not have a natural gift, but I just loved doing it," she said.

"Laura never disappoints," said Wim Roefs, if ART owner and Spong's art dealer who curated the *At 90* show. He has written numerous essays about Spong's work over the 10 years he's represented her. He's written of her "arsenal of marks, shapes, forms and scribbles" that "interact at once with ease and tension" in her pieces. Asked what kind of painter she is, he answered simply, "A very good one."

The Sumter County Gallery of Art is working closely with Roefs to bring Spong's work to the gallery. Roefs is no stranger to SCGA having curated *South Carolina Birds* in 2005 and *The State Art Collection* in 2006 at the gallery.

Many of Spong's paintings are bright and bold - swaths of vermilion, turquoise and kelly greens. She eschews straight lines in favor of squiggles, which she makes in loose strokes wielding a paint pen like an oversized crayon. The challenge of abstraction, she says, is using those non-objective shapes (you might see a face in that yellow blob; someone else might see a boat), to make a pleasing composition that takes the observer on a journey. When she begins a piece, Spong tries to make her mind as blank as the canvas. Sometimes she doesn't even know what color she is going to use. She picks up a brush and starts smearing. She doesn't like people to watch her paint, so the particulars remain a mystery.

"My best work comes when I don't think too much. If I sit here and think about a problem and what the solution might be, it will be very predictable," she said. "I feel like my intuition is better than my thinking process."

Spong's artist statement is as graceful and evocative as her paintings:

*I play.
I am like a child on the floor with blocks.
Arranging, rearranging,
Adding, subtracting,
Delighting in the shapes,
forms,
textures,
colors,
Until the components fall into place
And create a pleasing visual pattern.
I use ancient symbols and phosphenes
To connect with the world in time.
I use bits of forms and shapes I see around me
To connect with the world in space.
But, mostly I play with color.
First of all ...
... I like to paint; it is my passion.
My goal ...
... is to portray visually, in a non-objective manner, my own inner journey as I search for meaning and purpose in life.*

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My hope ...

... is through my work a connection will be made between me and those on a similar journey.

One of my tools ...

... is the use of symbols because of their universality, both ancient and modern. I like to use them in an attempt to make "the unknown known." Circles, triangles, spirals, crosses, Xs, and forms from nature have been in used for decorative and symbolic purposes since the earliest times of humankind.

My vision ...

... is that everything is connected. All is part of the whole. From a magnificent landscape to a few blades of grass, each is part of the whole and is equally important. My artworks are fragments of that whole that catch my eye, emotions, or imagination.

The *Sumter Artists' Guild Winners Show* – like the *Sumter Artists' Guild Show* is one of the gallery's most popular exhibitions of the year. The 2018 *Guild Winners Show* promises to be a strong one. The Judge for the show was Virginia Scotchie, a ceramic artist and head of ceramics at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC who has exhibited her work extensively throughout the US and abroad, and received numerous awards and she made some excellent choices.

First place winner was Amanda Cox, former SCGA Art Education Director and now the art instructor at Crosswell Drive Elementary for her large landscape "Bug Spot", Third place winner Napoleon "Brad" Bradford for his moving mixed media piece "Vietnamese-American



Work by Denise L. Greer

Orphan", Honorable mention winners, Denise L. Greer, Jim Wade and Jeanie Moore and Peoples' Choice award winner Halimah Shah. The Second Place winner, Michael Broadway moved to Virginia some months ago and unfortunately will not participate in the *Guild Winners Show*. The mixture of painting, collage and ceramics promises to be a visually exciting show.

As with all of the gallery's exhibitions, this is a community effort sponsored by Covenant Place Continuing Care Community, Synovus/NBSC and the Sumter Artists' Guild who presented the reception. Flowers are courtesy of Catherine Blumberg of Poinsett Garden Club & The Council of Garden Clubs of Sumter.

For further information check our SC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Gallery at 803/775-0543 or visit (www.sumtergallery.org).

Fine Arts Center of Kershaw County in Camden, SC, Features Works by Robbie Hinson

The Fine Arts Center of Kershaw County in Camden, SC, is presenting *Resting Place - The Roadside Memorial*, featuring Robbie Hinson's photographic

memorial on view in the Bassett Gallery, through Feb. 23, 2018.

The exhibition focuses on the roadside
continued on Page 21