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# Fine Art Connoisseur

THE PREMIER MAGAZINE FOR INFORMED COLLECTORS



FEBRUARY 2012  
\$8.95 U.S. | \$9.95 CAN.



Volume 9, Issue 1

STREAMLINE  
PUBLISHING, INC.



# Classic and Classy: Art in Charleston

BY KELLY COMPTON



Founded in the 17th century with the support of England's King Charles II, the picturesque seaport of Charleston, South Carolina, has long been renowned not only for well preserved houses, churches, and cobblestone streets, but also for its cultural sophistication. Although it was even more cosmopolitan in the 18th century, when almost every ship trading along the Atlantic coast put in here, Charleston offers art galleries, antique shops, and boutiques well worth exploring. Its inns, bed-and-breakfasts, and cafes are renowned for hospitality and quality, with most an easy stroll from the city's many historical sites.

The most prestigious visual arts institution in town is the **Gibbes Museum of Art**, opened in 1905 and now possessing more than 10,000 works, most with a connection to South Carolina or the South generally. The permanent collection is arranged to highlight significant people and themes in Charleston's rich history, including its crucial roles in the American Revolution and Civil War.

On view at the Gibbes from January 20 through April 22 are two important exhibitions.

The first examines Alfred Hutty (1877-1954), a leader of the so-called Charleston Renaissance of the 1920s, through more than 50 of his paintings, drawings, and prints. Hutty had already established himself in the lively art colony of Woodstock, New York, when he discovered Charleston in 1920; locals claim he wired his wife to say, "Come quickly, have found heaven." The Huttys then split their year between the Catskills and Charleston, where the artist celebrated the city's architecture, rural environs, and African-American residents in various mediums. Accompanied by an impressive book containing an unprecedented catalogue of 231 prints, the Hutty exhibition will move on to the Greenville County Museum of Art (South Carolina) and then the Morris Museum of Art in Augusta, Georgia.

Also on view at the Gibbes this season are recent realist paintings by Jill Hooper (b. 1970), who was born in upstate New York and raised in North Carolina, but earned her B.F.A. at the College of Charleston. Hooper studied with the classical realist D. Jeffrey Mims on and off through the 1990s, at various ateliers in France, and with Charles Cecil in Florence and Ben Long in Asheville. In 2007, Hooper was shortlisted for the BP National Portrait Award in London, and is now represented by Charleston's Ann Long Fine Art.



Alfred Hutty (1877-1954)  
*Saint Philip's Church*  
c. 1930, Oil on canvas, 32 3/8 x 32 3/4 in.  
Gibbes Museum of Art

## THE GALLERY SCENE

Most of Charleston's art galleries are located in or near the French Quarter, named for the talented Huguenot community of Protestants who fled Catholic France and contributed significantly to Charleston's prosperity. Although they offer a range of styles and mediums, the galleries here are aesthetically more traditional than the city's best known



cultural project, the *Spoletto Festival USA* mounted annually since 1977. (Tickets go on sale in January for the 2012 performances, which run May 25 through June 10.)

Particularly noteworthy among the galleries is **Ann Long Fine Art**, which represents the classical realist masters Charles Cecil, Daniel Graves, Ben Long, and D. Jeffrey Mims, as well as younger talents like Kamille Corry, Marc Dalessio, Leo Mancini-Hresko, Mario Robinson, Paula Rubino, and Jordan Sokol. Long also handles superb sculptures by Robert Bodem and Alicia Ponzio, as well as the estate of the German Expressionist Otto Neumann (1895-1975). At the **Charleston Renaissance Gallery** and **Carolina Galleries**, visitors find unrivaled depth in Renaissance artists of the 1920s. Among the key figures from this period are the aforementioned Alfred Huttly, Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, Anna Heyward Taylor, Walter



West Fraser (b. 1955)

*Can't Do a Thing*

2011, Oil on linen, 24 x 30 in.

Helena Fox Fine Art

W. Thompson, Elizabeth O'Neill Verner, and Bayard Wootten, though Carolina Galleries also handles such contemporary talents as Stephen Scott Young and Mary Whyte. Be sure to stop by **Moore House American Antiques** for Charleston Renaissance paintings, drawings, and prints, too.

**Coleman Fine Art** focuses intensively on Whyte, whose insightful watercolors of blue-collar Southerners were highlighted in the April 2011 issue of *Fine Art Connoisseur*. (Her impressive touring exhibition, *Working South*, will be on view at the Gibbes May 4-September 9.) Coleman also shows work by such gifted realists as Marc R. Hanson, Kevin Macpherson, and Gregory Packard. **Corrigan Gallery** represents such local standouts as John Hull, Gordon Nicholson, Kristi Ryba, and Sue Simons Wallace, while **Ella Walton Richardson Fine Art Gallery** features such painters as Lindsay Goodwin, Stapleton Kearns, Craig Nelson, and Aleksander and Lyuba Titovets, as well as a unique concentration of modern Dutch masters like Frits Goosen and Frans van der Waal. Impressive scenes of local natural beauty are made by West Fraser, who is represented by his wife, **Helena Fox**, at her eponymous gallery. (Fraser is the subject of a major retrospective at Savannah's Telfair Museums this season, on view February 24-May 6.) Fox also champions such national figures as Kenn Backhaus, John Cosby, William R. Davis, Donald Demers, Mary Erickson, Jeffrey Larson, Joseph McGurl, Billyo O'Donnell, and Joseph Paquet, as well as the renowned sculptor Kent Ullberg.

At **Horton Hayes Fine Art**, visitors will find impressive landscapes by Chris Groves and Mark Kelvin Horton, and still more at **Wells Gallery** by Junko Ono Rothwell, Sue Stewart, and Karen Larson Turner. **M Gallery of Fine Art** offers the Hudson River School-inspired landscapes of Utah's Ryan S. Brown, along with other leading realists like Clayton J. Beck III, Jacquelyn Bischak, Roger Dale Brown, Nancy Bush, Rose Frantzen, Howard Friedland, Albert Handell, Matthew D. Innis, Tony Pro, William A. Schneider, and John C. Traynor. **Smith Killian Fine Art** displays the sparkling canvases of Kim English and Shannon Smith, the observant animal sculptures of Darrell Davis, and the black-and-white photographs of Tripp Smith, who deftly captures the flat, swampy "Lowcountry" along the coast near Charleston. **Spencer Art Galleries I & II** is growing soon

Jill Hooper (b. 1970)

*Elizabeth*

2008, Oil on linen, 24 x 13 1/2 in.

Ann Long Fine Art



Ryan S. Brown (b. 1977)  
*A Painter's Inspiration*  
 2010, Oil on canvas, 72 x 84 in.  
 M Gallery of Fine Art



to encompass three consecutive storefronts on Gallery Row. Inside is a stimulating salon-style display of contemporary paintings, sculpture, and works on paper, many of local subjects, and many by members of the Spencer family. An array of outstanding artworks can be enjoyed at **The Sylvan Gallery**, including the sculptures of Gerald Balciar, Glenna Goodacre, and Richard Loffler, landscapes by William Berra, Trey Finney, Michael Harrell, Karol Mack, and Joseph Orr, and figure paintings by Scott Burdick, Susan Lyon, and Dean Mitchell.

Several galleries in Charleston have particular specializations. Most intriguing is **Gallery Chuma**, which features colorful artworks reflecting the Gullah culture that arose in the 19th century when African-Americans settled in the isolated islands and marshlands stretching from Jacksonville, Florida, north to Wilmington, North Carolina. **Dog & Horse Fine Art** has everything for devotees of the hunt, including works by Joseph Sulkowski and Beth Evans, while the **Audubon Gallery** focuses on the superb ornithological studies of John James Audubon.

#### A LIVELY CALENDAR

Charleston's museums, galleries, and artists work together regularly to engage locals and visitors. The French Quarter Gallery Association coordinates art walks on the first Friday evenings of March, May, October, and December, allowing more opportunities to explore galleries after regular hours.

On the weekend of February 17-19, at least 40,000 people will participate in the 30th annual *Southeastern Wildlife Exposition*, the largest event of its kind in America. On view at 18 venues around town will be paintings, drawings, sculptures, and photographs of nature presented by more than 500 international exhibitors; this year's featured artists are Dustin Van Wechel and Don Rambadt. Coming up in mid-March is a wave of activities that kick off the month-long *Festival of Houses and Gardens*, during which more than 150 private homes in Charleston's oldest neighborhoods open their doors to visitors. Also on deck in March is the ninth annual *Charleston International Antiques Show*, featuring more than 30 dealers, as well as the *Art & Antiques Forum*, a series of lectures by experts addressing the theme "America's Palette."

The **Charleston Fine Art Dealers' Association** (CFADA) will again organize the *Palette and Palate Stroll* on a July evening, when galleries open their doors and offer gourmet cuisine prepared by local chefs. Still more elaborate is CFADA's *Fine Art Annual*: next November, a whirl of open houses will converge with an upscale art auction and competitions for *plein-air*-ists and high school students. This past November, the annual *Charleston Art Auction* offered more than 100 representational paintings, sculptures, and vintage prints created by living and deceased artists generally associated with the American South. Total sales exceeded \$700,000, including impressive prices for masterworks by Clark Hulings, Stephen Scott Young, and Eudora Welty.

Catherine Spencer (b. 1957)  
*Memories*  
 2011, Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 in.  
 Spencer Art Galleries I & II



The historic quarter of Charleston is also home to a growing community of working artists, who eagerly welcome visitors to their atmospheric studios. Participating in the collegial network described at [charlestonopenstudios.com](http://charlestonopenstudios.com) are Michael Gray, Karen Hagan, Hilarie Lambert, Robert Lange, Kevin LePrince, Rick Reinert, and Mickey Williams. Painter Robert Maniscalco has regular open hours at his studio, as well.

Whenever you visit Charleston, there is bound to be a cultural happening on the docket. Just be sure to leave enough time to wander the city's streets and shoreline: losing track of time is a key reason to visit this seemingly timeless place. ■

KELLY COMPTON is a contributing writer to *Fine Art Connoisseur*.

**Information:** For details, contact the Charleston Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, [charlestoncvb.com](http://charlestoncvb.com)