

Circling the Arts in St. Armands



Scott Causey creates animals with a "make and break" technique.



Photos by Laura Lewakowski

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Contributing Writer

Jerry Berta loves talking to people about his artwork. He creates beautiful pieces of "Funky Art", primarily in the form of handcrafted porcelain diner replicas. Yes, that's right! Classic American diners — the kind you go into and order a burger and fries. Diners are traditionally "a piece of pie, a cup of joe, and a red, white and blue plate full of Americana." These real diners were the inspiration for Jerry's porcelain diners, which were featured at the 18th Annual St. Armand's Festival of the Arts, Oct. 14-16.

St.Armands Circle was transformed into a living art gallery on Saturday and Sunday where a mixture of fine art and funky art caught the eye of browsers and shop-

pers. "Locally, this festival has become a much anticipated annual tradition", says Howard Alan, the event organizer. "This art fair has grown to be one of the nations best, ranked by Sunshine Magazine as one of the top 100 shows."

Unlike a gallery or museum, a fine art festival such as this one offers art enthusiasts the unique opportunity to meet the artists in person, commission a specific piece, ask questions about techniques, and learn the sources of the artist's inspiration — and purchase fine works of art directly from the artists.



Jerry Berta points to the small screen in the Star diner, which plays from an actual DVD player.

Artists from around the country contend for one of hundreds of coveted spots through a jury process, resulting in the best works in painting, sculpture, prints, glasswork and jewelry being shown

throughout St.Armands Circle. Jerry Berta successfully made the cut.

Jerry had always loved diners: they were the inspiration for his work, but he also loved to eat in them, so that's how it all began in 1987. Jerry is the owner and artist-in-residence of Diner World in Rockford, consisting of two beautifully restored classic American diners. "Rosie's Diner," a 1945 diner originally located in Little Ferry, New Jersey, is familiar to every baby boomer as the locale for the Bounty television commercials with Nancy Walker. At Rosie's, you can have breakfast, lunch and dinner. Jerry and his wife, artist Madeline Kaczmarczyk, now call a second diner, "Uncle Bob's Diner" from Flint, Michigan, "The Diner Store-An American Art Gallery," and features artwork. They have been creating funky pottery since 1975.

Though inspired by the real diners, which he considers large works of art, Jerry never runs out of bright ideas. He does motorcycle diners, Corvette Diners, a Cowboy Café and even small Volkswagens. His work comes with or without neon or shiny silver, and he loves to do commissions. "I love talking to people about my artwork," he says. "And, I love to do commissions. Tell me your idea and I will create a beautiful piece of Funky Art based on your idea."

Berta considers his pieces of art as "road trips where you can park and go inside." His current favorite piece is his Star Movie Theater. Through the entrance door of the theater, you can see the current movie advertised as "now showing" on the marquee. He has ingeniously rigged up a DVD player in the back of the piece and you can watch an old movie, such as "It's A Wonderful Life" right in the porcelain theater.

Other mediums represented at the Art Festival included dramatic acrylic paintings by Orlando artist Maria Reyes Jones. Her Chihuahua, Rita Pepper, accompanied her but horses are one of her favorite subjects. Watercolor artist Susanna Spann is internationally known for her beautiful paintings of crystal and flowers. She has

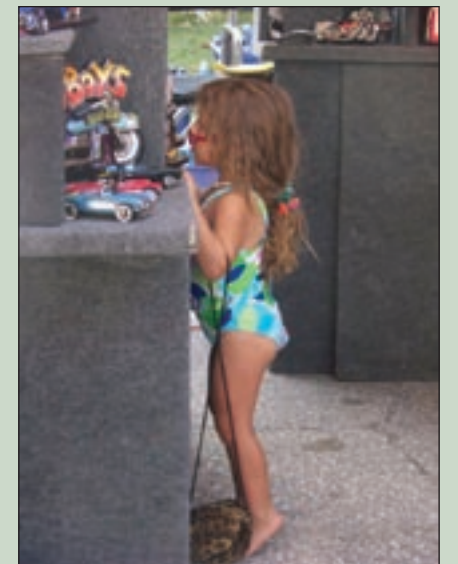
recently authored her own book, "Painting Crystal & Flowers in Watercolors" so she can better share her skills with the visitors she meets at art fairs and festivals.

Scott Causey's style has been shaped by many different events and ideas. "I was anxious to get away from the potter's wheel and vessel form so I returned to what I had been doing as a child — making animals." He came up with the "make and break" technique of taking apart then rejoining pieces — actually breaking his animal shapes into pieces using the wooden handle of a hammer then "pasting" the pieces back together again. No two ceramic sculptures ever look the same. Scott currently lives and works in Sarasota and is a graduate of The Ringling School of Art and Design.

What could be better than spending a day at the Fine Art Festival browsing through versatile works of art and hearing unusual stories? Coming home with a piece of art to make you happy all year long, until next year's festival. There's something for every taste and budget. Prices ranged from \$20 to \$20,000.

For more information on these artists:

- www.jerryberta.com
- www.mariareyesjones.com
- www.susannaspenn.com
- [www.Scott@Causey.com](mailto:Scott@Causey.com)



A young admirer checks out Berta's diners.

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and unusual of any I have experienced.

Feeling thoroughly pampered and peaceful, I took my time wandering back among the tropical splendor to our room. It would be time to leave soon and continue on to our conference. Though it seemed a shame to spend only one day in this luxurious place, I promised myself that next time we would return for a longer stay.

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