

Gallery COR



Left to right: Meryl Lefkovich, Leslie Rowland, Fracness Domingues, Wade Oppliger, Adrienne Del Toro, Stephen Quinn. — Portrait photo by Steve Mann

Getting to the COR of the matter

Artist Leslie Rowland opens a premier gallery showcasing Asheville's self-taught artists, challenging traditional notions of who can create viable art.

GALLERY FOCUS JULY

What kind of place is Gallery COR, what does it offer to the already art-filled bustling downtown, and who should check it out? That's a question proposed to any new business opening their doors. For Gallery COR the answer comes the way of 1950s Holden Caulfield, who would most likely buy his art, or at least consider buying art here if he had the money.

Caulfield is a fictional character, but the metaphor is strong because Caulfield represents those who do not like to be force-fed what is or isn't and sees that much of what is only serves to wag the dog.

Leslie Rowland, the owner, and creator of Gallery COR, explains, "I wanted to ensure that Asheville artists

remain represented downtown. I also want to see self-educated artists who have reached a high level of skill in their craft and have developed their processes and mediums shown in a premier Asheville gallery."

Asheville has long been a haven for artists seeking solace and inspiration. The city pulsates with a palpable energy, drawing countless visitors captivated by its charm and what the locals call "Keeping it weird."

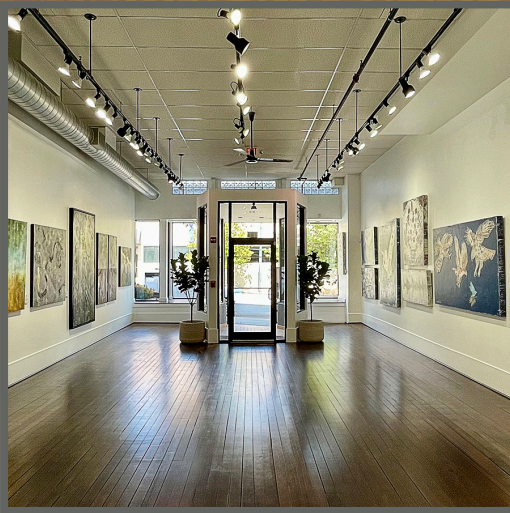
As artists moved to the Asheville area and sold their wares in the 1990s, they attracted little attention amongst the art-buying communities of Atlanta or Charlotte, let alone exist on the radar of the national and international art scene collectors.

In 1997 it was more common to hear, "This ain't

Article and background illustration by Dennis Ray

Santa Fe or Scottsdale," than to hear anyone say, "Why, Asheville is an arts destination." A few Galleries, like Blue Spiral, 16 Patton, and Art International, sold art, but the rent was cheap back then, and buyers were mainly visitors here to hike or shop the stores, would purchase a painting or sculpture, and the galleries did okay. But as a tourist with long grey hair pulled back in the style of 1970s lore, said to me in the summer of '98, "A gallery or two doesn't make a destination, son."

Something happens. A population or groups of people in a business can go on for years or decades with little to no change, then things start rolling, and when they start rolling, it is like Moore's



Inside Gallery COR



Leslie Rowland's tiger, a symbol of strength and beauty, is placed prominently behind front desk



Franciss Domingues' stunning metal sculpture.

Theory on steroids.

Artists attracted other artists, and as I said, the rent was cheap. Within a decade, Asheville started being recognized by the New York Times, USA Today, and other publications as a place to visit for art. Throughout the twenty-teens, the population grew, but the tourism industry, well, it exploded.

New high-end hotels soon peppered the cityscape. As they were built, it wasn't uncommon to see eight or more highrise cranes lifting iron beams on any given day. With so much tourism growth, bringing in many art savvy collectors, it didn't take long for galleries to pop up, and the River Arts District to become a destination, no longer an afterthought, something to do on Sunday before heading home.

As the hotels grew, they brought in a need for expensive boutiques and restaurants, and the rent was no longer cheap.

Amidst Asheville's dynamic growth and evolution, the once-vibrant art community witnessed profound transformations. By 2018, the landscape near the bustling hotels and restaurants in downtown Asheville, which owed much of its revitalization to the local artists, had drastically changed. The escalating demand for prime real estate triggered soaring rents, casting a shadow of uncertainty over the city. Once havens for creativity, historic buildings succumbed to the wave of development, transforming into even more upscale hotels and retail establishments catering primarily to the tourist influx. This shift, viewed by many citizens, altered the originality and uniqueness of downtown Asheville, diminishing its distinctive artistic and eccentric character.

In this transformative era, Asheville's identity today stands at a critical juncture, prompting residents to ponder the future trajectory of their city. With concerns mounting over the proliferation of trends and influences mirroring other destinations, a pertinent question emerges: What enduring qualities continue to draw people to Asheville?

Amidst the ever-shifting currents of change and uncertainty, Gallery COR emerged this summer as a creative force, staunchly advocating for the recognition and celebration of local artists. Understanding the intrinsic value of the artistic voices within Asheville, Gallery COR defies the conventional notion that the best artists are brought to the city. Instead, it boldly asserts that the finest talents can be found right here among Asheville's vibrant and eclectic artistic community.

In essence, Gallery COR is a testament to the power of artistic merit transcending geographic boundaries. It champions the idea that talent, innovation, and creativity are not confined to specific art capitals but can manifest anywhere, given the right platform and recognition. By bridging the gap between the local and the global art scene, Gallery COR showcases the exceptional caliber of artists that Asheville has to offer, inspiring a reevaluation of the traditional notions of artistic legitimacy and regional hierarchies.

Gallery COR's intimate space is an unfiltered expression of raw talent. Each brushstroke and thrust of the palette knife is imbued with the artist's truth and unwavering commitment to their craft. At first glance, one may see a kaleidoscope of styles, mediums, and narratives from the four artists represented here. A closer examination reveals that a second glance can

sometimes change the whole perspective. Each style, color palettes, mediums, and individual creativity, complement the other artists. This is Rowland's genius; it not only showcases some of the best artists here but those whose works, although diverse, are harmoniously complimentary, curated perfectly for an Architectural Digest or Southwestern Art magazine feature spread.

What Rowland has, the ace up her sleeve, is she not only knows these artists but the entire pool from which to draw her cup. And from it she has put together a marvelous assemble. Reinforcing that she and her artists at Gallery COR are not merely passive observers of the art scene or are showing their work here because they show in every other city worldwide, and why not Asheville, but because they are invested in the community and rooted in the local arts, challenging the traditional notions of artistic legitimacy and recognition. The gallery's commitment to showcasing self-educated artists represents a paradigm shift in how art is perceived, paving the way for a more inclusive and diverse local art community where artists from all walks of life are given equal opportunities to shine, saying, "If your good. If you are the best of the best. Then welcome. Let's get to work."

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GALLERY COR
Leslie Rowland
Gallery Hours: Mon-Sat 11–5 pm
 Sunday 12–4 pm
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 gallerycor.com • (760) 855-8663

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