



## **Sunshine Artist Magazine**

### **38<sup>th</sup> Annual CenterFest, Durham, NC**

CenterFest is back, and better than it's been in many years. Long held downtown, the show, claiming to be the oldest arts festival in the state, was shuffled off to a parking lot while downtown upgrades were put in place. Last year the event was cancelled altogether to be "retooled," and the decision was sound, because this year's festival was excellent.

CenterFest organizers juried a fine group of 130 artists from 18 states, including 82 from North Carolina and 18 from Durham's own lively art community. The mix of disciplines was a good balance, and the mix on the streets was well-thought-out. The overall quality was very good, including a good number of painters, unique sculptors, fine potters and several artisans whose work defied their genres. The standout for me was the birdhouses built from beautiful hardwoods, like fine furniture, and so elegant their buyers often hang them inside.

Since the festival has moved back downtown, it was laid out in a nice rounded triangle of streets and plazas and load in was a breeze. The artist amenities included good coffee and pastries both days, and good box lunches from one of the fine local eateries. (Durham has become a real foodie destination, so these were not your usual "sandwich and chips.")

Durham has been going through a renaissance in the last five years. The city center is still half empty, but the occupied storefronts are filled with really good restaurants, and the arts play a central role in the "new" Durham, including the Golden Belt art studios, rehabbed tobacco warehouses; the Carolina Theatre, a beautifully restored historic venue, and the 2200 seat glass-fronted Durham Performing Arts Center. The Durham Arts Guild has its offices in a municipal building with a first-rate exhibition center just around the corner from the Carolina Theatre and the convention center.

Durham is consistently rated highly as a 'creative community' and the organizers of CenterFest appear to want the festival to reflect that, as well as reflect well on their city in

general. They are doing a great job encouraging and showcasing the arts, and CenterFest is living up to its name once again.

CenterFest organizers did a good job of getting the word out, and the crowds on Saturday showed good numbers, interested viewers and knowledgeable collectors. Most of us left Saturday evening expecting to have a really great weekend.

Unfortunately, Mother Nature had other things in mind and Sunday dawned cool and very wet. The rain came and went in varying degrees throughout the morning but people still ventured out, in raincoats and umbrellas and great hats. As the afternoon progressed, the rain abated and the streets got almost crowded, but the sales were nothing to what they would have been with a second great weather day.

That said, nearly everyone I spoke with did well. Even three painters I know who only sell originals (no reproductions of any kind) did well enough to call it a good show, and one called it great.

This show is worth the travel. The organizers clearly care for the artists, keep everything running smoothly (load out was a breeze – when does that happen?!), have thoughtful, observant booth-sitters, and good communications all around. The Durham locals seem very pleased to have their show back too, and I see lots of support in the form of sales going forward.

<http://centerfest.durhamarts.org/>

Carol Joy Shannon

Raleigh, NC

caroljoyshannon@live.com