

Deer Isle's Turtle Gallery celebrates 30...

by Maureen Farr

One of the first galleries in the area, Turtle Gallery was established in a small storefront in Deer Isle village in 1982. The gallery represented regional artists and craftspeople, and all of the work related in some way to the beautiful coastal surroundings. In the mid-90s, the gallery moved up the hill to the historic Centennial House, first occupying the barn that had previously been the home of the galleries for the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts and Deer Isle Artists Association. With the move, the gallery was able to add sculpture to its offerings, as well as larger and more varied shows in the new space.

To celebrate its 30th year, Turtle Gallery will host a schedule of five summer shows with a common theme of "Continuing Connections," honoring the works of older established artists who have been with the gallery since the start as well as work by some younger emerging artists. Each show will have an opening reception on Sunday afternoon (see schedule on Turtle website: www.turtlegallery.com/events.html).

Turtle Gallery owner Elena Kubler told us there weren't many galleries back then, although there were many people with wonderful work.

"When I came up with the idea," she said, "I got positive support from many artists — among them were Dan Hodermarsky, Fran Merritt, Karl Schrag, Emily Muir, Siri Beckman, Henry Beerits, Larry Moffet, and many others.

"We started on a shoestring. We were tiny — we had a tank of turtles in the window, and my daughter had a lemonade stand outside. The Galley (our local grocery store) was next door, and I met a lot of people who were going to get the mail. It was fun."

Continued on page 14



Elena Kubler and her daughter, Caitlin Johnson, in the doorway of the original Turtle Gallery.

photo courtesy: Elena Kubler



*The present
Turtle Gallery
on a beautiful
summer day...*

photo courtesy:
Turtle Gallery

When asked if she ever thought she should stop running the gallery, she replied "I never felt I should stop. I guess I was lucky that I had role models who had been involved in the arts, and I knew as an artist that it was something I needed to do.

I did a lot of my own art work back in the early days of the gallery, but now I mostly run the gallery. I have learned a lot from the artists we work with and from the clients who are interested in the work we show.

I enjoy being able to get different kinds of people together in a space I have created. My artist daughter, Caitlin Johnston, helps me in selecting much of the craft that we show. She has been helping off and on at the gallery for 30 years!

Elena Kubler has always recognized artistic talent, and her ability to make connections with many of the best American artists over the years shows in the lineup for this 30th year.



*Interior view of one of the rooms in the
main house at Turtle gallery.*

photo courtesy: Turtle gallery

In conclusion, I would like to share this wonderful statement from Elena:

Turtle ponders about the Art world

Some large museums still segregate crafts as “decorative arts” to distinguish them from “fine arts”. I continue to wonder about this, and 30 years ago I called my business The Turtle Gallery - Fine Art and Contemporary Craft for a reason.

In the middle of the 20th century the Studio Craft Movement began to merge into the area of Fine Art as works being done actually eluded categorization. Now, the most interesting work seems to be energized by a free flow between media. New and recycled materials are freely used. All this adds up to the ideas that make our very own American Art.

And where does Maine, and in particular our region fit into the scheme of things? Places like the Haystack School and The Maine College of Art where many media are offered play a large role.

The Turtle was started to fill a gap in our community made up of fine artists and craftspeople. What drew us to the region was primarily the beauty, the quality of life, the tremendous atmosphere and the people. It seemed to make sense at the time to designate Fine Art and Contemporary Craft in order to signal an inclusive idea about what was on offer.



Arthur Hardigg “Imaginary Portrait #1” pastel.



A partial view of the sculpture garden. photos courtesy: Turtle gallery

As I think back on my decision, I still find the two terms useful and worth discussing. The Turtle is a regional gallery in a state where there are fine places to study and work.

The American art world is made stronger by the work that comes from our state of Maine. It has been a great pleasure being part of it for thirty years. ■

*Turtle Gallery, 61 N Deer Isle Rd, Deer Isle, Maine 04627. 207 348-9977.
www.turtlegallery.com*

*Open 7 days a week from May 26 through October 13th (Columbus Day):
Mon - Sat 10-5:30; Sunday 2-6*

*See complete summer schedule at:
www.turtlegallery.com/events.html*

Check our online calendar for events: www.artsguides.com/calendar