

Community Cultural Heritage Study- Sarasota's International Model for Public Art *Ellen S. Goldberg*

Sarasota, Florida has a long history of being a cultural art community. Institutions of renown that have had longevity and are popular in the community are the **Ringling Art Museum, Ringling College of Art and Design, The Arts Center of Sarasota**, an active **Arts Alliance** and artist in schools program as well as many performing arts venues. Sarasota was also the winter headquarters for the **Ringling Circus** and still boasts the former residences of **John and Charles Ringling** of circus fame and a circus museum. Each year an important film festival is also held in our community, The **Sarasota Film Festival**. The community is also in the throes of fundraising for a 22 million dollar contemporary art museum known as **Sarasota Museum of Art**.

In 1998 two residents of Sarasota Jill Kaplan and Bruce White, became the founding members of **Sarasota Season of Sculpture**. Originally established as a for profit organization set into place to exhibit and broker sales of large scale sculptures, this organization became a not for profit entity



View of Sarasota Season of Sculptures' *Under Azure Skies*, 2012

with a board of directors. Biennial exhibits along Sarasota's downtown **Bay Front Park** are organized with a \$100,000 budget consisting of donations and grants. Operating with all volunteer staff, **SSoS** plans for the shipping, insurance, maintenance, sculpture bases, sculpture selection and curatorial work, marketing and tours of this exhibit. Previously a small paid staff handled these arrangements.

Susan McLeod is the acting Chairperson for **Sarasota Season of Sculpture** with a background in the arts that includes previous ownership of her own art gallery in Sarasota. Other board members include a former director of a contemporary art museum, and the president of the local art and design college. The organization maintains a website and offers tours that must be pre-arranged. The organization does not have a physical office site.

Sarasota Season of Sculpture states its mission as “To accessibly display and encourage quality public art in order to enrich the cultural and educational experience of residents and visitors”. Their vision statement is “To be an international model of and destination for public art” and their core value is “To promote and celebrate cultural diversity through public art”.

SSoS is on display from sunrise to sundown, seven days a week, from November to May along Sarasota’s magnificent bay front viewed by passing cars or by foot or bike on a sidewalk and bike trail. Of major consideration in organizing this event is the weather in Sarasota, and in particular the hurricane season. Insurance is purchased with this in mind and extra costs are incurred with the need for special wind rated bases and tie downs for the sculptures should the unfortunate occur. Some sculptures must also be repainted due to wear and tear from travel and from sun exposure.



Oh'd, Bret Price, Galvanized steel, 84” x 40” x 55”

Each season of this exhibit begins with an opening, this year held at the **Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art**, a local art gallery of excellent reputation in Sarasota. The closing ceremonies and fundraiser are also held at this gallery site as well.

Now in its sixth exhibition season, **SSoS’** current display, *Under Azure Skies*, contains ten very large scale sculptures that were originally curated for an exhibit in Switzerland, by renowned Southeast sculptor John Henry. Presented in this exhibition are the diverse sculptures of Isaac Duncan, Verina Baxter, Bret Price, Douglas Schatz, Chakaia Booker, Peter Lundberg, John Clement, Terry Karpowicz, John Henry and Albert Paley. Though all American sculptors, this has not always been the case of prior season’s artists. These artists convey global ideas through the use of many materials such as recycled rubber tires, steel, aluminum, granite and concrete and titles such as *Portal; Mercury, Mars, Venus; and Complexus*.

Those who have assisted greatly with publicity and marketing and sponsorship are **SNN Channel 6** (Sarasota Television News Network); **Sarasota Magazine** (responsible for publishing a four page glossy pullout about the exhibit in one of their issues); the **City of Sarasota**; and Sarasota’s tourist development tax revenues, as well as many private donors.

At issue and of major challenge for this organization are future funding and the desire to restructure in order to once again have a paid staff. And future plans and goals would be to connect with the new contemporary arts museum and other

organizations for collaboration and support of educational initiatives.

In the past and present exhibits have been controversial and the board of directors of this organization wants these sculptures to encourage dialogue, to generate conversation, and get people talking about art. This is also an aim of public art. As I visited this site I noticed people of all ages walking and cycling past these artworks and some stopping to take photos and interact with the sculptures.

In association with this year's exhibit a **Sculpture Symposium** will be held at the **Ringling Art Museum**. Keynote speaker will be the exhibit's curator, John Henry. Other speakers at this seminar will include sculptors, arts administrators, donors, collectors, curators, gallery owners, and board members of various arts organization.

Last season's exhibit featured a highly controversial sculpture, ***Unconditional Surrender***, a three-dimensional interpretation of the famous photo, taken in New York's **Times Square**. A local veteran purchased this sculpture for \$500,000 and donated it to our city. Its perpetual maintenance has also been covered. Though, not well received by all, it has generated much conversation and has become a permanent fixture and landmark on our city's bay front helping to put Sarasota on the map as an international destination for public art.

For further information view or contact:

Web site: [www.](http://www.SarasotaSeasonofSculpture.org)

[SarasotaSeasonofSculpture.org](http://www.SarasotaSeasonofSculpture.org)

E-mail: info@sarasotaseasonofsculpture.org

YouTube video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvPYRh8-ChA>



Unconditional Surrender, Seward Johnson, Aluminum, Permanent Site, Sarasota, FL 2012

News article: http://weblogs.sun-sentinel.com/news/specials/weirdflorida/blog/2009/06/a_kiss_is_just_a.html