

Editorial COMMENTARY

by Tom Starland, Editor and Publisher

The April Fool

For those of you who were in shock over what you were reading - you got taken in by my April Fool's joke. For those of you who were cheering - I guess the real joke is on us. It was all in good fun. I've been wanting to do an April Fools commentary for some time. I've waited 25 years so cut me some slack.

My little spoof about being appointed to the South Carolina Arts Commission by Governor Nikki Haley may have fooled a few who are not veterans of my commentaries, but there were two basic flaws to the premise.

First, our governor is not that clever and second - there is no way I would allow myself to be boxed into a corner like that. After all, I'm not made of rubber - as in rubber stamp.

The idea of me as a member of that board might make for some interesting meetings, but it wouldn't accomplish anything. The staff has too many rubber stamps sitting on that board and frankly I see the Arts Commission as a lost cause - as far as the visual arts go.

To me the Arts Commission only serves the purpose of providing me and our readers a little comic relief and an occasional steam-letting session.

My only fear in publishing my little April Fool's joke is that the Governor will get re-elected and use the scenario I presented on how she can shut down the Arts Commission, or at least take control, by taking control of the Board. The Commission Board currently has only seven members of what is supposed to be a nine member board. Is her plan to slowly strip them of Board members? If that's her plan to stop the Arts Commission - maybe she has all the intelligence I give her credit for - not much.

Oh, and the stuff about the Spoleto Festival USA - that's all wishful thinking on my part. I doubt the visual arts will ever be a major part of the Spoleto Festival USA again, which is very disappointing.

Year One for ArtFields

Starting Apr. 19 and extending through Apr. 28, 2013, the first ArtFields event will take place where 400 artists from throughout the Southeast will be hoping that hordes of art lovers will be heading to Lake City, SC, and voting that their artwork is the best - winning them a \$50,000 top prize. A total of \$100,000 will be awarded during the event.

We hope this event is a great success and continues to take place for years and years to come creating an arts destination in the heart of the Pee Dee area of SC.

We first brought you news of this event back in July of 2012. When I first heard of the event I started asking questions to get a grip on what this event was all about. I wanted to make sure I was clear in answering questions that I knew I would be hearing from artists as they found out about the event. Info was a little fuzzy at first and it seemed the more I asked questions the more distance the organizers put between me and themselves. I got the feeling they were not sure how things would work themselves and they were sensitive to being quizzed on their plans. That usually sends a warning flag up for me.

I basically decided I wanted this event to happen and chalked up some of the fuzziness to a first year effort. The first year of anything goes through growing pains.

In the end, the big question will be is how do the folks in Lake City feel about the event. Will they want it to go on and on? In time the event will grow even bigger - if it continues?

I look forward to attending the event several times as it is just up the road from us and reporting what I see and casting my \$50,000 vote.

Whatever happens we should all give a big thanks to Darla Moore who made it all
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possible.

For more info about the event and all that is being offered visit
(www.artfieldssc.org).

The Good New/Bad News

Early last month I saw a twitter post about the fact that for the first time in a decade - an attraction other than the Biltmore House in Asheville, NC, came in as the top attraction in NC. In 2012 the NC Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh, NC, came in as #1.

I guess the good news is that two NC art institutions were included on the list. The NC Museum of Art came in at #14 and the Mint Museum came in at #27.

To most reading this, the bad news is that the Mint was behind the NASCAR Hall of Fame, the Battleship North Carolina, and Linville Caverns.

Hey, don't get me wrong - I've been to the Linville Caverns, zoos, warships and old forts, but being in the art biz, it's hard to take the reality that most people preferred to go in a dark hole in the ground than to the Mint Museum.

Here are the top 30 most visited museums and historic attractions in North Carolina, along with their attendance numbers for 2012.

1. NC Museum of Natural Sciences, Raleigh, 1,220,814;
2. Biltmore House, Asheville, 1,123,144;
3. Discovery Place, Charlotte, 762,261;
4. North Carolina Zoo, Asheboro, 761,964;
5. Fort Macon State Park, Atlantic Beach, 739,780;
6. Marbles Kids Museum, Raleigh, 611,048;
7. Fort Fisher State Historic Site, Kure Beach, 564,269;
8. Wright Brothers National Memorial, Kill Devil Hills, 469,007;
9. North Carolina Arboretum, Asheville, 494,270;
10. Museum of Life and Sciences, Durham, 446,485;
11. NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores, 444,308;
12. NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher, Kure Beach, 433,954;
13. NC Museum of History, Raleigh, 342,371;
14. NC Museum of Art, Raleigh, 288,032;
15. NC Maritime Museum, Beaufort, 286,504;
16. Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, Manteo, 283,177;
17. Natural Science Center of Greensboro, 280,755;
18. NC Aquarium at Roanoke Island, Manteo, 279,508;
19. Grandfather Mountain, Linville, 248,224;
20. Chimney Rock State Park in Chimney Rock, 212,436;
21. Battleship North Carolina, Wilmington, 211,043;
22. NASCAR Hall of Fame, Charlotte, 184,771;
23. Schiele Museum of Natural History, Gastonia, 181,744;
24. Airborne Special Operations Museum, Fayetteville, 176,809;
25. Linville Caverns, Marion, 172,414;
26. Tryon Palace, New Bern, 172,073;
27. Mint Museums of Charlotte, 161,859;
28. Cherokee Cultural Attractions, Cherokee, 157,146;
29. Morehead Planetarium/Science Center, Chapel Hill, 147,825; and
30. Old Salem Museums & Gardens, Winston-Salem, 138,105.

As hard as I tried, I couldn't find a comparable list of attractions in South Carolina on the Internet. Sorry Microsoft - Bing was no better than any of the other search engines - regardless of your advertising.

Of course Charleston, SC, was recently named the number one tourist attraction in the US, but it's more of a living museum and the admission to go there is very high. And because of the high volume of visitors that go there, some of the commercial galleries there may see many more people pass through their doors every year than some of the above mentioned attractions, but they're free to visit.

If any visual art institution wants to send us in their attendance numbers - please do. I'd like to see how we match up against NC - being a smaller state and all - population wise and in size.

So what does this all mean? Well it means we have a lot of work to do convincing the general public that going to an art museum or art gallery can be just as interesting as walking into a dark hole in

the ground. And, we have to be a lot more kid friendly too.

A New Super Star at Carolina Arts

In the past, some of our favorite covers have come from artists such as Brian Rutenberg, Mary Whyte, and Colin Quashie, but last month a new star was born with our cover of works by Peter Scala, of North Charleston, SC.

Scala joined the 100,000 download club by riding the cover of the March 2013 issue of *Carolina Arts*, which is not unusual, but the posting that this issue was ready to be downloaded on Facebook became our highest viewed posting - ever. And, not by just going over the number of views from the next highest, but by blowing everything else away.

In our first year at Facebook we saw some entries that reached the 400 views mark, but after Facebook did one of their redos to make people pay to have their posts seen by all their "friends" or "likes" our numbers dropped down to the 250-350 range. Within a week of posting the notice that the March 2013 issue was ready - that posting was viewed over 2,300 times. It got 31 shares - meaning a lot of folks liked that cover. That many shares is not unusual, Feb. 2013 got 26 shares, but only 285 views.

The next three posting reached the 500 mark riding the Scala cover's coattails and then things slowed down again.

Scala's work is a little unusual for today, I've called it "a taste of old world modern art" in the past. It's colorful, it's from the mind and it has the right stuff.

By the end of the month our totals were over 123,000 downloads and over 2,400 views on the posting on Facebook.

A Few Words From Down Under

We have another blast from the past this month from Judith McGrath's column "A Few Words From Down Under" which originally ran in our Aug. 2004 issue, but somehow the subject remains fresh today. She's talking about artists who ride the "fad" wave to stardom - think Damien Hirst.

Sequestration is Catching Up with the Arts

The mess of the sequestration is slowly filtering down to the arts as federal agencies make their across the board cuts. That includes NEA funds state arts agencies were counting on. And as that budget cutting trickles down to other arts groups, the pain of a Congress that can't make a deal sinks in - not just in the arts, but in all aspects of our lives.

If we keep electing party idealists who can't compromise on issues - what else should we expect but results that don't make sense?

Just remember - these folks in Congress didn't cut their salaries. They seem to exempt themselves from every law they pass on to the rest of us.

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