

Arkansas Democrat Gazette

Arkansas' *Legacy* Newspaper

TWO NEW ART GALLERIES EXHIBIT OPTIMISM

Thursday, June 18, 2009, Section E

Opening an art gallery, given economic realities, might seem a risky undertaking.

But two new high-end galleries in central Arkansas are flying in the face of that logic - Greg Thompson Fine Art, 429 Main St. in North Little Rock's Argenta district and Boswell-Mourot Fine Art, 5815 Kavanaugh Blvd. in Little Rock's Heights neighborhood.

Thompson's gallery specializes in "important Arkansas artists, Southern regionalists and Modern artists of the 20th century," while Boswell-Mourot emphasizes contemporary works by national and internationally-known artists and several Arkansas artists. Both greatly enrich the cultural landscape.

After a private reception Thursday, Thompson's gallery opened to the public Friday during the Argenta Third Friday Art Walk.

Located on the second floor of the historic Faucett building, the 3,300-square-foot gallery exudes a big city vibe with white walls, hardwood floors, 18-foot high ceilings and windows that tower as high as 14 feet. Arkansas artists in Thompson's stable attending the opening included Barry Thomas, known for his landscapes, and Alice Andrews, who works in pastels and oils.

Also present were Mark Blaney of Russellville, whose large canvas *Passage* was particularly captivating with its van Gogh-like color and motion in the grass and flowers, hints of impressionism and art nouveau showing a mystically imbued grove of trees, and A.J. Smith, a University of Arkansas at Little Rock art teacher, whose exquisite graphite and silverpoint portraits are intricate and soulful.

Other Arkie eye-catchers were J.O. Buckley's wonderful landscapes, particularly *The Lesson*, with its two dogs in a Buffalo River-like setting; Rebecca Thompson's charming *Cause for Concern*, a landscape of a chair floating over a highway that brought Georgia O'Keefe's *Ladder to the Moon* to mind, and Blaney's painted ceramic *Widow's Conversation*.

Many in attendance were rightfully generous in their appreciation of other works, particularly the Thomas Hart Benton pieces, including a lovely Buffalo River scene and *Radio Soprano*, Clementine Hunter's colorful *Saturday Night* and the Carroll Cloar pieces, among them the delightful *Two Farmers*, a 1953 work in casein tempera. A dark Pablo Picasso linoleum cut, *Le Dansueur* was also shown.

Opening a gallery "was a logical extension of my business as an art broker," Greg Thompson says. He launched his brokerage and consulting firm in 1995. In addition to acquiring art for the Arkansas Arts Center, Crystal Bridges, the Art Institute of Chicago and others, he works with a group of private and corporate clients (including Stephens Inc., McDonald's and Tyson Foods) who "are buying quality art for investment, knowing it will hold its value. He has brokered works by Benton, Andrew Wyeth, Matisse and Georgia O'Keefe, among others.

"I felt I wasn't growing," Thompson says of his motivation to open the gallery. "My wife and I were talking with Martin and Melissa Thoma and Melissa said I needed to have a public space to grow my business. It just made sense."

The economy, he says, didn't make him hesitate. "People with disposable income are still buying art," he says. The art market "has fallen off to about 2007 levels and some bargains are definitely out there."

Among other artists whose works hang in Thompson's gallery are George Dombek, Donald Roller Wilson and Charles Harrington (including the spectacular *Arkansas Gold*). Thompson's gallery enhances one's appreciation of the depth of Arkansas talent.

The gallery's prices start at \$800 with some pieces offered in the six-figure range.

Its first one-man show will showcase Dombek's work and will open Sept. 18 A Buckley show is scheduled to open Nov. 20.

What does Thompson look for when he's scouting work for the gallery or his own collection? "It's always what I love, what I fall in love with. It has to have something magical about it, I know it when I see it."

That also is his advice to people who are beginning to collect art.

"When you fall in love with something, buy it," he says. "Don't buy it for investment, buy it because you love it. The investment aspect is gravy. And don't worry about where the art is going ... that's always going to change."



Dudley Vance, an ink, graphite and sepia wash by Thomas Hart Benton (1889-1975) is one of the works featured in the inaugural show of Greg Thompson Fine Art in North Little Rock.