Art as far as the eye can see

Weekend festival expects large crowds as it kicks off tonight

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YOU CAN GO

- What: Artisphere, Greenville's Arts Weekend
- When: 4-8:30 p.m. today; 10 a.m.-8:30 p.m. Saturday; 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday
- Where: Main Street from Broad to the West End
- Cost: Admission is free; outdoor activities and performances are free; some ticketed events

Tens of thousands of fun- and culture-seekers are expected to attend Artisphere, Greenville's Art Weekend, which opens downtown today under sunny skies and continues through Sunday.

The six-year-old festival has had a meteoric rise in recognition. It ranks sixth out of 600 fine arts festivals in Greg Lawler's Art Fair Sourcebook, up from 46th in 2008. The 2010 festival has been named one of the top 20 events in the region by Southeast Tourism Society, its third such honor.

The centerpiece is Artists Row, a juried show and sale along Main Street featuring the works of 120 artists from the Upstate and around the country. But the festival shares its wealth of visitors with local arts organizations.

Among the lineup of events is Artisphere's "Art Around Town," which promotes local arts events. Local arts groups hoping to increase their footprints have organized everything from a symphony guild fundraiser to a high school art exhibit to an opera company performance surrounding the festival.

"We try to promote arts organizations that are doing something special to celebrate Artisphere by including them on our program," said Kerry Murphy, Artisphere executive director. "The real goal of the festival is to promote Greenville's ever-expanding cultural community."

Among those is the nascent Greenville Opera Company, which is eager to offer what its founder, lyric tenor Jim Broussard, calls "an art form not widely available as of yet to Upstate patrons." Broussard said the GOC is grateful for the opportunity to perform during Artisphere, which offers the company welcome exposure.

The recently formed professional ensemble's "A Night at the Opera," tonight at Christ Church Episcopal, will present arias by Verdi, Puccini, Rossini and Boito.

The BJU Museum and Gallery at Heritage Green is pleased to join Artisphere activities for the third time, curator John Nolan

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said.

He extends an invitation for visitors to view the gallery's "The Power of Portrait" exhibit. It is comprised of nearly 40 portraits from medieval times to the 19th century, including mostly paintings, but also photographs, stained glass, terra cotta and other varied media — all European art.

Included among the art works in the show are 18 pieces from private collections, which Nolan said offers visitors "a unique opportunity to see artworks from the region in private collections."

In addition to the main feature, the Artist Row that stretches from Broad Street into Greenville's West End, there are two indoor exhibits.

The Metropolitan Arts Council-sponsored "Artists of the Upstate Exhibition at Centre Stage" offers an in-depth look at works by artists living and working in Greenville.

The other, the Chairman's Exhibit, on the first floor of *The Greenville News* building, features works from three regional galleries, the Elder Gallery, Hampton III and Blue Spiral.

First-time exhibitor Larry Elder, of the Charlotte-based Elder Gallery, said having grown up in the Upstate, he's excited to return to Greenville, although it's a much different place than it was then. "I am happy to be part of Artisphere 2010 and look forward to introducing a number of new artists to the folks who attend," he said.

The exhibit will be open Saturday from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. until 6 p.m.

In addition to the abundance of art, festival-goers will find food and music at the Culinary Arts Café Stage, more musical performances at the Peace Center's Amphitheatre and two special shows at the Gunter Theatre, the eclectic Calder Quartet on Saturday and world-renowned guitarist Sharon Isbin on Sunday.

Tonight's free amphitheater shows feature the acoustic sounds of Charleston's Matt MacKelcan at 6:30 and indie rocker Erin McCarley of Nashville at 8:30.

For the younger set, there's Kidsphere. Its Apprentice Workshop offers kids the opportunity to become artist for a day through a variety of fine art learning experiences. It goes on Saturday from 10 a.m. until 7:30 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. until 5 p.m.



SUZIE RIDDLE / Staff