

LAUREN PETRACCA/STAFF

Jennifer Janeiro, owner of Bone and Ink, works on an ink drawing in a studio at her home in Pendleton on Wednesday. Janeiro will be participating in Artisphere for the first time this year.

ARTISPHERE
BIGGER AND BETTER

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Jennifer Janeiro always loved art but never thought she could make a living at it.

Until she discovered pen-and-ink drawing about four years ago.

The Pendleton resident creates minutely detailed portraits of people and pets that vibrate with personality and life.

"I can spend hours drawing and not realize how time has passed," Janeiro said.

Today through Sunday, Janeiro, 28, can be found in Booth No. 129 as one of a record 135 artists from around the country participating in Artisphere.

Greenville's big open-air celebration of the visual arts, rated as one of the finest in the nation, also will feature dozens of food vendors, music groups and street performers — as well as 600 volunteers who keep everything running.

Artisphere, presented by TD Bank, is expected to bring tens of thousands of art and music fans to downtown Greenville this weekend.

Janeiro is participating in Artisphere for the first time, and she sees it as a great opportunity to sell her work and make contacts for future com-

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missions.

"It's a big honor, the biggest show I've ever done," Janeiro said. "I hope to come home with a lot of work."

Rey D'Alfonso, an abstract painter, is traveling from Miami, Florida for his second Artisphere.

"As far as we're concerned, it's a perfect show, very well run, very professional," D'Alfonso said.

D'Alfonso loves the event's location and friendly atmosphere.

"We love that the show is in the middle of downtown," D'Alfonso said. "Artists are welcomed and loved by the city."

Greenville's cornerstone public event is bigger than ever, with more artists and added attractions, said Kerry Murphy, executive director of the festival.

This year, the festival will extend across Augusta Street well into the West End toward the Greenville Drive ballpark. The total of 135 visual artists is 14 more than last year. The artists work in a variety of media: from painting to woodwork to sculpture, jewelry, ceramics and photography. Among the new features at this year's Artisphere:

Making the Connection sculpture: Artisphere patrons will be invited to help create a large-scale communal sculpture in Falls Park, using low-tech everyday material like plastic tubing and elbow joins. The project will be guided by London-based artist Julian Wild, making his U.S. debut.

"It will be something that will grow throughout the festival weekend," Murphy said. "It's a really neat concept."

Acoustic Cafe Stage: Artisphere is adding its fourth stage this year to accommodate the region's growing list of musicians. The stage will spotlight local talent such as Charles Hedgepath, Kylie Odetta, Reeve Coobs, Rachel Troublefield and Chaquis Maliq.

Food trucks at Artisphere: Automatic Taco and Highway 301 will offer food during the late-night concerts, after most food vendors have shut down.

Windstream Social Media: A new social media listening center will track Artisphere-related digital posts on four large screens.

"You'll see the conversation on Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms about Artisphere," Murphy said.

Artisphere, a massive undertaking, wouldn't be possible without the army of volunteers who work at the festival to earn money for local nonprofit groups.

In addition, the City of Greenville plays a big role — from creating space for the artists' booths on Main Street to overseeing entertainment.

"The city helps with the performing arts contracts, making sure we have all the lighting and sound equipment we need, and picking up musicians at the airport," Murphy said.

Murphy's overarching goal is to make sure the festival has something for everyone — for art patrons but also for families who come to enjoy the free music or the hands-on activities for children at Kidsphere.

For the adults, a popular wine-and-beer tasting event was added a few years ago. Patrons will get to choose among 34 different wines this year. More than a dozen breweries are represented in the event.

The ever-popular visual performing artist Brian Olsen will return to create his huge portraits of famous people as fans watch, usually in awe.

Among other top attractions are the Artist of the Upstate exhibition and a display of the best work by high school artists in Greenville County Schools.

"We're always looking for new programming ideas and making sure we're relevant, that we're doing just as much if not more than the other shows," Murphy said.

A happy medium

Artisphere's theme this year is "Find Your Happy Medium." Janeiro, the Artisphere newcomer, dabbled in art all her life but only found her happy medium, pen-and-ink drawing, a few years ago.

"I drew and painted all through school," Janeiro said. "I really found my niche with pen and ink. That's what gave me the confidence and drive to keep going. It's when I knew this is what I'm meant to do."

Janeiro works as a wellness clerk at Earth Fare but eventually hopes to be a full-time artist.

Her family is originally from Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey, but moved to Greenville when Janeiro was 4 years old. She attended Eastside High School and the Greenville County Schools Fine Arts Center.

Artistry runs in her family: Her mother, aunt and sister are all involved in crafts or painting.

It takes Janeiro 12 to 24 hours to create a meticulous pen-and-ink portrait. She strives to reflect something of the character of her subject. "I want to show the personality through the drawing," Janeiro said. "I like to see the person shine through. Maybe it's just a little crook in the smile. It's the little things that suggest personality."

Janeiro hopes in the future to expand her artistic interest to watercolors and other media but right now she's looking forward to Artisphere and making a life with her new husband, Jonathan Allen, who she married last week.

"My husband has been a big influence on me and has always helped me to believe I could do anything," she said.

Top festival

Artisphere arrives today with another accolade to its credit. It was once again named one of the Top 10 visual arts festivals in the nation.

The event placed No. 9 out of 600 similar festivals judged by Greg Lawler's Art Fair Sourcebook, a respected resource for artists and patrons. The festival also continues to rank high in artists' sales.

Artisphere, still-relatively young at 12 years old, shares accolades in the Art Fair Sourcebook with esteemed company: well-established arts festivals in much-larger cities such as Chicago, Houston, Philadelphia, St. Louis and Portland.

Artists' sales in 2015 over the three days of Artisphere were an average of $7,300. High sales such as those attract the interest of artists from across the nation. In all, the 121 artists last year saw sales of $883,000.

As another sign of its growing prestige, Artisphere received more artist applications than ever, 1,090 this year, compared to last year's 995 applications.

"We had a fantastic pool of applicants to choose from," Murphy said. (In its first year, 2005, Artisphere received only 282 applications and average sales were $2,400.)

Fifty-five of the 135 artists are new to the festival. "That's always exciting," Murphy said. "People love to see familiar faces but new faces as well."

Seventeen of the artists are from the Greenville area. Artisphere is also big business for Greenville, particularly for downtown, with an estimated $5.5 million economic impact for the community, Murphy said. The volunteers, meanwhile, raise money for such nonprofit groups such as the S.C. Children's Theatre, Greenville Chorale, International Ballet and several others.

Last year, Artisphere contributed $25,000 to nine local nonprofits.

David Lominack, TD Bank market president, said events such as Artisphere play a vital role in Greenville's quality of life and contribute substantially to economic development.

TD Bank is the presenting sponsor of Artisphere. "Events such as this help maintain the attractive quality of life in our community, and we are happy to play a part in helping Artisphere continue its great success in the Upstate and on the national stage," Lominack said.

During the festival, Murphy can be found visiting with artists, musicians, sponsors, judges and food vendors, making sure everything is running smoothly.

"There are a lot of places to be and a lot of decisions to be made on the fly," Murphy said.

What if there's a last-minute cancellation by an artist? No problem, said Murphy. Artisphere is such a prestigious event that there's an extensive waiting list for artists. Another artist can be invited on the spur of the moment.

What really keeps Murphy up at night is concern for the weather. A storm can devastate the festival.

"The only thing that impacts our attendance is weather," Murphy said.

Artsy success

For Murphy, who has led the festival for nine of its 12 years in existence, the key to success has been figuring out, through close listening and trial-and-error, what Artisphere patrons most enjoy.

"There have been a lot of tweaks through the years," Murphy said.

Among the many changes, the festival's opening was moved from 4 p.m. to noon on Friday, the popular beer and wine tasting event was added, and the entire weekend of the festival was shifted

about five years ago from the third week of April to the second week of May.

That last change meant Artisphere no longer competed with another visual arts festival in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Suddenly, artists' applications shot up.

"We also pay attention to what patrons are attending in the way of performing arts and culinary arts," Murphy said. "We've always focused on what's going to create a unique experience and the best practices that others are doing. We try to raise the bar every year."

Through the years, Artisphere has established a sterling reputation among both artists and arts patrons as a friendly event that takes place in a beautiful downtown.

"I'm probably biased but the backdrop for Artisphere, downtown Greenville, is phenomenal," Murphy said, gesturing toward Greenville's Main Street on a recent sunny day.

"The artists are blown away by the charming downtown and the professionalism of the folks with the city, the police officers, the volunteers and the whole infrastructure," she said. "Then you've got such a hospitable community. They just can't say enough about Greenville."

Artisphere's strengths build on one another, Murphy said. As the festival's reputation grows, more artists apply to participate. That allows organizers to be increasingly selective, so that Artisphere maintains high artistic standards and showcases a diverse group of artists.

"Artist applications increase, the quality of the artists has improved over the years, and sales increase," Murphy said. "Word gets out that it's a fantastic place to buy art. It's just a snowball effect."

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What: Artisphere 2016
When: noon to 8 p.m. Friday; 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday (Late-night concerts continue until 9:45 p.m.); 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday
Where: Downtown Greenville
Tickets: Free, although some events (such as the Wine and Craft Beer Experience) have an admission price
Information: 864-271-9398 or www.artisphere.org