

Art for everyone

BART BOATWRIGHT/STAFF

Artist Leandra Hill makes jewelry in her studio at her home in Greenville on Tuesday. Hill is a local artist who is participating in Artisphere for the first time this year.

Greenville's big arts fest returns for 11th year

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Leandra Hill has long been a devoted fan of Artisphere, enjoying the art works and the live music as an annual Mother's Day outing with her mother.

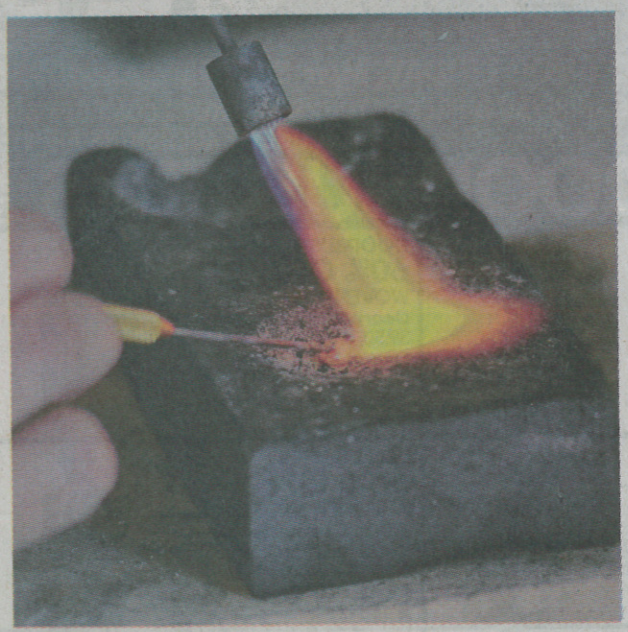
This year, Hill will make the leap from patron to featured artist. She'll be thrust into an elite company of some of the nation's most accomplished artists.

Artisphere, Greenville's big celebration of the visual arts, is widely recognized as one of the nation's top arts festivals.

The competition for artists, who exhibit and sell their work, is intense.

Only 121 of 995 applicants made the cut this year. A record 17 local

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Leandra Hill melts gold for one of her jewelry pieces. Hill will be a featured artist at this year's Artisphere.

Online now:

Find a complete database of the 121 artists participating at this year's Artisphere on GreenvilleOnline.com. Search artists by name, hometown, medium and booth number.

BY THE NUMBERS

11 years for Artisphere

$5.5 million economic impact over three days

121 featured artists

56 live performances

7 food vendors

40 portable toilets

600 volunteers

3,538 volunteer hours

being a featured artist at the event.

Artisphere

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artists, including Hill, were accepted.

Hill, a Greenville native, will showcase the jewelry she painstakingly creates in her home studio.

For Hill, being accepted for Artisphere represents a decisive affirmation of her work.

"I'm very excited," Hill said. "It's a great event, not only in Greenville but in the entire country. It's an honor to be in it."

Artisphere, which gets under way Friday, ranked No. 7 in Greg Lawler's "Art Fair Sourcebook," an influential guide to arts festivals nationwide.

Tens of thousands of people are expected to journey to downtown Greenville this weekend for three days of colorful art, great food, free music, street performances and activities for children.

At the heart of the 11th annual Artisphere are the 121 artists who display their handiwork in booths lining Main Street.

The featured artists work in a variety of media — from painting to woodwork, ceramics, sculpture, photography, glass and jewelry.

"It's great to get a chance to meet people because most of my customers are online," Hill said. "I enjoy getting their feedback on my work, to find out what people like and what they'd like to see more of."

Hill fashions earrings, pendants, necklaces, bracelets and other items by melting metal — often sterling silver or 14-karat gold — and carefully hand-hammering each piece into shape. She never uses molds or castings.

"Each piece is slightly different and unique," Hill said.

Feast for all

Although art is the centerpiece of the festival, the event is a feast for all of the senses.

Artisphere, presented by TD Bank, offers the dancing beat of live music on several stages, the enticing aroma of local cuisine served at the Culinary Arts Cafe, and fun-filled hands-on art activities for children in Kidsphere.

Things actually start hopping in downtown Greenville tonight, with booths and stages being constructed and a gala taking place at the Marriott.

One of the festival's big weekend attractions is the wine-and-beer-tasting event, which takes place every day from 1 to 6 p.m. on the Graham Plaza in front of the Peace Center. A $10 ticket buys six tastes of beer or wine.

"There are always dozens of wines available and we'll have a more expansive craft beer list this year as well," said Kerry Murphy, executive director of Artisphere.

The hyper-kinetic Brian Olsen returns to the Art in Action Stage, where he will create huge portraits of famous folks in a matter of minutes to a musical backdrop of driving rock. Olsen will be on-stage from 12:30 to 5 p.m. Friday and Sunday, and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday.

The Denver-based Olsen has been a prominent feature at Artisphere since its beginning.

"I get so many questions from people wanting to know if he's coming back," Murphy said. "Yes, he is."

Musical headliners for the festival include alt-rock band Civil Twilight on Friday at 8:15 p.m. and folk-rock band Apache Relay on Saturday at 8:15 p.m.

With Republican presidential candidates meeting in the packed "Freedom Summit" at the Peace Center on Saturday, there's a chance also that Artisphere patrons may get to shake hands with Donald Trump, Rick Perry or Ted Cruz if they choose to take a stroll down Main Street.

New to the festival

This year's festival will include a number of new features.

For one, 43 of the 121 featured artists are attending the festival for the first time.

Clemson University's STEAM exhibit will offer interactive experiences, as the acronym implies, in science, technology, engineering, art and math. Inside the Clemson tent on Main and Broad streets, Clemson students will feature two types of robots that draw.

A new "Art Lab," located at the corner of Main Street and Camperdown Way, will offer hands-on art activities for adults, including soap-making, chalk-painting and kitchen printmaking.

"It provides more opportunity for patrons to participate," Murphy said. "It's Kidsphere for adults."

In the art demonstration area, a new shop will spotlight traditional printmaking techniques including etching, letterpress and silkscreen. It will join returning demonstrations in glassblowing, metalworking and woodworking.

Another new feature will be colorful, larger-than-life puppets that will roam Main Street on Saturday and Sunday. They'll join other street entertainers such as human statues and musicians.

"It'll be a neat spectacle," Murphy said.

A new People's Choice Award will allow patrons to vote for their favorite festival artist on the Artisphere website. The winner gets a $500 cash prize.

The Culinary Arts Cafe will feature food by seven local restaurants: Larkin's on the River, Barley's Greenville, The Trappe Door, Roost, Mimi's Steakhouse of Japan, Gringo's and, in Kidsphere, Funneldelicious.

"It's a great group of restaurants," Murphy said.

Festival favorites

This year's Kidsphere, always a favorite for families with young children, will feature hands-on activities such as paint-and-sew vests, fish mosaics, stained-glass lanterns, drama hats and a sculpture zone.

Returning this year will be a juried exhibition called Artists of the Upstate in the Founder's Room above Larkin's on the River. It will showcase about 70 works by Upstate artists throughout the festival.

Greenville County Schools will feature its annual High School Juried Art Show next to the Marriott on Main Street. More than 200 artworks will be featured by students from all 14 Greenville County high schools.

"The quality of artwork made by the students within the art classrooms of Greenville County continues to astound me," said Jennifer Bise Fox, the lead high school visual arts instruction in the Greenville school district. "I hope everyone else is as moved by the talent of these young people as I continually am."

Fox and other panelists will participate in a discussion about the value of arts education in the schools on 1 p.m. Saturday near the high school show.

YOU CAN GO

What: Artisphere 2015
When: Noon to 8 p.m. Friday; 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday; 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.us

ART CHAT

What: Paul Hyde, arts writer for *The Greenville News*, will lead a free Art Chat on the value of arts education in the schools.
When: Saturday, 1 p.m.
Where: The Greenville County High School Juried Exhibition area, located next to the downtown Marriott on Main Street.
Panelists: Arts educators Bradley Wingate and Jennifer Bise Fox; and college art student Olivia Adams

Greenville's Metropolitan Arts Council will present "One-Stop Open Studios" during Artisphere at its location, 16 Augusta St., in the West End. The exhibition highlights local artists who participate in Open Studios, the annual self-guided tour of local artists' work spaces in the fall.

"This year's festival is going to be outstanding, as they all are," said Alan Ethridge, executive director of the Metropolitan Arts Council. "Every year, Artisphere expands its efforts to include more resident artists in the many festival activities."

Big business

Artisphere is also big business for Greenville, particularly for downtown, with a $5.5 million economic impact for the community, Murphy said.

For Hill, the jewelry artist, Artisphere represents another important step in her career as an artist.

It was while majoring in psychology at the College of Charleston that Hill discovered her life's work.

"I worked in a jewelry store throughout school and just loved it so much," Hill said. "I knew even before I finished school that I was going to pursue jewelry."

Hill searched for a personal artistic stamp before homing in on simplicity.

"I struggled a while because I kept trying to make my designs more complicated but I realized that what I personally wanted to wear was simple gold stud earrings or a simple silver pendant," she said. "When I started to make that, it seemed to resonate with other people. I like to stick with very simple, classic styles."

All events are listed on the Artisphere website (www.artisphere.us), and full-color brochures will be available at the event as well.

For the latest in local arts news and reviews, follow Paul Hyde on Facebook and Twitter: @PaulHyde7.