

Press Release



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Artists adapt to a digital world

Open Studios Tour reveals the diverse ways artists pursue their passion

CLARK COUNTY, Wash. — As any artist knows, there's incredible satisfaction in actually creating physical objects with your own hands. This is the real attraction of the studio — not just for the artist but everyone who encounters an artist in their place of work. Yet now we live in a world where an artist's livelihood, career, or business success depends increasingly on effective use of the web.

Visitors to this fall's Clark County Open Studios Tour will find a broad cross-section of artists and artisans, many of whom are finding their own way of striking a balance between their art making and the digital world. Studios on this fall's Clark County Open Studios Tour are scattered far and wide, from Woodland to Washougal. While there are 50 artists on the tour each year, there is always a different 50. In fact, 15 of the artists are entirely new to Open Studios this year. Among disciplines represented are wood turners, ceramicists, printmakers, fiber artists, glass artists, and many others.

Business-savvy artisans like leathersmith and painter Kathleene Kavanagh or textile artist Deb Spofford, while working with old-world crafts, are optimizing their success through personal ecommerce websites.

World traveler and second-generation leather worker, Kavanagh combines her father's craft with an understanding of what an artist or journaler wants in a book. Her pieces are one-of-a-kind heirlooms, crafted by hand, yet her online store shows that she is as connected to the web as she is to the ground. (Kavanagh lives in a canvas Sibley Bell tent as "artist in residence" on a farm in Brush Prairie.) Though she prefers meeting face-to-face with her buyers and handing out her business cards at Night Market Vancouver, it's her website with beautiful photos of each product, that can close the deal. "I wanted the website to be true to my nature, simple and honest," she says.

Spofford, a self-acknowledged member of the "slow fashion" movement, developed much of her knowledge of textile design and block printing from her time living in China. She now produces beautiful hand-printed textiles in her rural Felida studio, successfully marketing them through her "Made on 23rd" website. A first-time visitor to her classy website would be surprised to learn that every item is made in her small studio. "Actually it's been hard," Spofford says, "to balance looking so professional with getting people to understand that

everything is done by real human beings and not printed on a big machine in China.” Her solution: Creating and sharing a stop animation video on Instagram to show how her block printing is done. A hands-on traditional craft is made sustainable thanks to the tools of the web.

“Social media and technology are a critical part of our business,” Spofford says. “We have the ability to reach people within our local community and around the world through the Internet that otherwise would not know we exist. Customers have access to our business 24-7, even when we are sleeping!”

Fine artists are finding ways to use new tools as well. Artists Paul Solevad and Noah Matteucci both have supplemented their more exploratory, creative work with work that can be marketed with an effective presence on the web.

Solevad is an accomplished painter working in a style he calls “cartoon expressionism.” With a background in both fine art and illustration, he is able to evolve his fine art painting while positioning himself on his website for illustration work with stunning examples in the form of graphic posters. His work speaks to this moment. “I think I’m reflecting these times,” he says, “just the way artists have always created work that’s a reflection of the world around them.” In doing so, he subtly injects his own commentary on what’s going on in the world.

Matteucci embraces technology as he uses algorithms that loop pixels, lines, and dots to generate images for his art. While he creates both digital and traditional prints, the majority are pulled by hand. In the eclectic output from his computer-generated imagery, Matteucci wants to show the human side of digital art. His fine art prints and avant-garde printmaking installations are balanced out by more traditional products that he creates in his basement studio for “Pixel Press,” his Etsy shop.

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About Clark County Open Studios

Clark County Open Studios is a program of the nonprofit, Arts of Clark County, and is made possible in part by assistance from the City of Vancouver, Washington Lodging Tax Grant Program. Additional funding is provided by artist application and participation fees, our local business sponsors, plus volunteer and community support.

Clark County Open Studios website: <https://ccopenstudios.org/>

2018 Guidebook: https://ccopenstudios.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018_CCOS_guide_online.pdf

About Arts of Clark County

Arts of Clark County (AoCC) is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization created for the purpose of promoting, encouraging, and enhancing creative expression and artistic opportunities in Clark County and Southwest Washington. The arts contribute to this region’s unique character as a desirable place to live, work and visit. AoCC and its volunteer board of directors supports all forms of art—music, theater, dance, literary, visual, and media art—and works to ensure that arts experiences are inclusive of individuals of all ages and backgrounds. Arts of Clark County website: <https://artsofclarkcounty.org/>