



ARTS ADVOCATES FACT SHEET

Inspiring, educating, and connecting people to the arts for over 50 years

artsadvocates.org

Who We Are

Arts Advocates is a membership organization dedicated to inspiring creativity, advancing education, and connecting the community to the arts. We do this through sponsoring creative educational and cultural programs, and awarding scholarships to students pursuing careers in the arts. Arts Advocates has the largest collection of Sarasota Art Colony artworks on exhibit anywhere.

History

Arts Advocates, formed as The Fine Arts Society of Sarasota, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, held its first organizational meeting on April 24, 1969. By the first official meeting, October 23, 1969, there were already 57 members. Arts Advocates now has nearly 250 members who participate in luncheons with notable speakers, workshops, educational tours, and other activities that support the arts.

The Sarasota Art Colony

Over the years, the organization has assembled a renowned collection of paintings and sculptures from the Sarasota Art Colony of artists who migrated to Sarasota from the 1930s to the 1970s. Represented in this collection are Syd Solomon, Ben Stahl, and other artists whose works are exhibited in major museums around the world. They were inspired by Florida's natural beauty and the circus, which provided an abundance of subjects. Many began their own schools of art, helped found Ringling College, and laid the foundation for Sarasota becoming an epicenter for the arts. The collection is on display at the Arts Advocates Gallery and in the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall.

Art Collection – Docent Tours

In 1970, the Fine Arts Society purchased its first piece of art: Hilton Leech's watercolor painting, "Descending Yellows." By August 1970, works by Jerry Farnsworth and Charles McCurry had been acquired, and the collection now contains over 60 pieces representing a wide range of media and styles. Also on view are five paintings by the Florida Highwaymen.

In 2021, Arts Advocates members Richard and Cecilia Conder donated five Highwaymen paintings to our collection which are on display in our gallery. The Highwaymen were a group of 26 African American landscape artists, mostly self-taught from the Fort Pierce, Florida area, active from the mid-1950s into the 1980s. Because of the racial climate at the time, no galleries would accept their work. As a result, they sold their art door-to-door or from the trunks of their cars, often still wet, along Florida's eastern coastal roads. Their renown grew internationally during the early 2000s, and the members have been recognized for their contributions to mid-twentieth century Florida culture and history.

The Arts Advocates Gallery, located in The Crossings at Siesta Key mall, 3501 S. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, is open to the public every Saturday from 2:00-4:00 pm. Free docent-guided tours are offered every Saturday at 3:00 pm. No appointment is required. Written information is available for self-guided tours. Group and special tours of the gallery can be arranged through Stephenie Frasher, docent team leader, at docent@artsadvocates.org or by calling 443-454-2206.

The collection at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, 777 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, can be viewed via the Art & Backstage Tour at the Van Wezel. This tour features works from our Sarasota Colony artist collection as well as noted Florida artists. The backstage tour provides a peek at the Van Wezel's dressing rooms, green room, back hallway, and stage. Tour dates are July 11, August 8, and September 12 from 1:30 to 3:00 pm. Cost is \$15 per person; tickets are available only through the Van Wezel box office, 941-263-6799 or visit the box office Monday through Friday from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Proceeds benefit Arts Advocates and the Van Wezel.

Scholarship Program

The scholarship program offers tuition assistance to Sarasota and Manatee county resident students and is based on need, academic achievement, and artistic talent. Since 1969, over \$1,000,000 has been awarded to students whose studies include visual arts, dance, creative writing, music, theater, and architecture. Grant recipients have attended Berklee School of Music, Pratt Institute, Ringling College of Art and Design, and many other renowned institutions.

Speaking of the Arts

Our Speaking of The Arts lecture series features internationally known leaders in all fields of the arts. The inaugural event featured Marin Alsop, then conductor of the Baltimore Symphony, who was the first woman to lead a major orchestra. She described her "Adventures On and Off The Podium," referencing her own amazing story and the challenges she confronted in her career.

Our second lecture featured Lynn Ahrens, who has written extensively for theater, film and television, winning the 1998 Tony, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle Awards for the lyrics of

the acclaimed Broadway musical, “Ragtime.” In the same year she received two Academy Award nominations and two Golden Globe nominations for best song and best score for the animated feature film “Anastasia.”

We Zoomed over to London for our presentation with Francisco Serrano, an artist with England's Royal Ballet who began his studies at the Sarasota Cuban Ballet School. Serrano shared his star-studded journey from Sarasota to London via New York and Havana.

Arts Advocates Membership

Membership dues start at \$55 annually for an individual. Other membership levels can be viewed online at artsadvocates.org/join.