

Thanks to residencies, artists have the freedom to follow their muse

Second Home

By Amy S. Mercer



Provided

Fred Jamar is one of a few artists benefitting from residency programs

I was recently commiserating with my friend Erin Bennett Banks, local illustrator and creative director at the Gibbes Museum of Art, about the fact that there's never enough time outside of work and family to spend on our own creative endeavors. I need more time to finish my book — she needs more time to work on her design projects. We fantasized about how great it would be to participate in a residency program. "Just imagine," I said, 'what could be accomplished with endless, uninterrupted hours to submerge ourselves in art.'

Thankfully, some lucky souls actually get that chance, thanks to the handful of artist-in-residence programs in town.

If you're a visual artist in Charleston, you have at least five opportunities. Residencies are available through the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, Redux Contemporary Art Center, Robert Lange Studios, and The Vendue, and when the Gibbes Museum reopens this spring, it will have both short- and long-term artists in residence in their studio space on the first floor.

The relatively new program at The Vendue is unique because it's in a hotel instead of a museum or gallery. "The original intention of this program was to feature a rotation of artists, but current resident Fred Jamar is such a staple in the local art scene that we can't imagine this program without him," says Emily Rigsby, Vendue's art docent. "It's not an easy thing to have a studio in a public space, but Fred thrives in that environment." Every Tuesday night from 6-9 p.m. the Belgian oil painter paints in the studio and engages with the guests."

Jamar has been working in his Vendue studio for nearly two years and acknowledges that working in front of other people in a public space slows him down, but he enjoys the pace. "I'm not on a production line," the painter says.

There's also another benefit to being watched. "Knowing I'm observed pushes me to be better, more audacious," he says.

Meanwhile, the folks at Robert Lange Studios are providing mail art artist Bob Ray a home while his Halsey show, *Correspondence Art*, runs Jan. 21-Feb. 11.

This kind of relationship is not uncommon for the studio. "Working with the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art or Redux Contemporary Art Center by housing visiting artists who are creating exhibits for them, we aim to facilitate creative networks and connect the local art community with the global sphere of contemporary art," says Lange.

But the gallery couldn't make Ray's residency possible without support. Their program is funded through an arts education grant from the S.C. Arts Commission and requires the artist to work with six area public schools.

Like Robert Lange Studios, Redux receives assistance from the S.C. Arts Commission, in addition to the philanthropic Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation. Still, running the gallery isn't all rainbows and unicorns with that influx of free cash. "It's a hustle every day. And I mean, every single day," says Redux Executive Director Stacy Huggins. And some of that hustling involves rustling up visual artists from around the country.

"These are mid-career artists whose CVs will blow your socks off. They've exhibited far and wide and have lists of accomplishments, awards, and publications as long as your arm," Huggins says. "We provide the artists with freedom and resources to create, without the pressure to sell their work. They're being paid by us so that removes a large burden for the artist. They are able to sell their work, and I'm so proud to say that many of the artists who have exhibited with us during my time have sold artwork, almost entirely to local collectors. It's no small boost for an artist who is building a career."

Be that as it may, there are really no satisfactory frameworks for assessing and demonstrating the impact of these residency programs. "The tangible results — the plays and dances, books and music, and other creative works — often emerge months or years after the first creative spark," Huggins says. "And many times the greatest impacts — on the individual artists themselves, on their communities and audiences, and on all the lives they touch — are not tangible at all."