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ARTISTS MAKE COOL SPLASH AT ST. PETE SHOW

ST. PETERSBURG – Fine art shows were different 25 years ago, when a small group of local artists started an indoor summer show at an Eckerd College activity center.

“When we first started doing art shows, everybody would gather at somebody’s house or we’d have a barbecue and everybody

was just talking about art,” said Lisa Glaser, who has brought her colorful collection of ceramic figures to the Cool Art Show since its beginning. “Now, all of the sudden, it’s, ‘How much money did you make?’ It’s a totally different feel now.”

Many of the 75 artists at this weekend’s Cool Art Show inside the Coliseum in St. Petersburg do expect to make good money at what remains the city’s singular fine arts show in the hot months of summer.

The reason for that is the show’s long-standing reputation as a juried show “for artists, by artists,” which means patrons won’t find any peddlers of mass-produced prints looking just to turn a profit.

Considerably smaller than some of the area’s signature outdoor art shows such as the Gasparilla Festival of the Arts and Mainsail Arts Festival, Cool Art was envisioned as a place for up-and-coming local and regional artists to display their work.

The number of fine artists and the quality of their work both have gone up through the years, said Susan Rollins Gehrling, president of the Professional Association of Visual Artists, which organizes the show.

Since the show moved from a smaller space at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg to The Coliseum eight years ago, the number of artists nearly has doubled and attendance has gone up by several thousand, she said.

St. Petersburg woodworker Jim Smith started coming to the show last year with his variety of handcrafted wooden vases and peppermills, which show off a variety of natural wood hues. “A craft show doesn’t bring the level of buyer we’re looking for,” said Smith, whose pepper mills have appeared in the kitchens of celebrity chefs such as Guy Fieri and Bobby Flay. “This is the only show we do in Florida in the summer,” he said.

The Cool Art Show continues Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at The Coliseum, 535 Fourth Avenue North.

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