

# *the* Southerner online

## Callanwolde hosts first-ever arts festival

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As the old-timey trolley drove down the long, winding driveway leading up to the picturesque mansion, the dozens of people seated inside awaited an eventful day at the first-ever Callanwolde Arts Festival. Complete with more than 85 artists, two food trucks and one exclusive VIP reception, the indoor festival took place Jan. 25 – 26.

Hosted by the Atlanta Foundation for Public Spaces (AFFPS), the arts festival took almost six months to plan and featured a vast array of photography, sculpture, metalwork, glasswork, jewelry and other art forms that could be viewed for only \$5. The AFFPS plans about 13 events annually, such as the Old Fourth Ward Park Arts Festival and the Piedmont Park Arts Festival.

"I'm extremely fond of Callanwolde because of its historic value and its place in the community," AFFPS president Patrick Dennis said. "So the challenge has been to really respect that and to communicate that to the artists who are participating."

Dennis met with Peggy Johnson, Callanwolde Fine Arts Center's new executive director, about a year ago to talk with her about how AFFPS could best support Callanwolde.

"This is a milestone. We've not ever done a formal show indoors," Dennis said.

Most events hosted by AFFPS take place outdoors, with a few other smaller scale events or independent art shows presented indoors. These outdoor festivals typically can only take place between March and November due to temperatures. Because of the expansive Callanwolde mansion and grounds, however, the art festival was able to occur during the middle of January.

Lisa Windle, the AFFPS festival director, enjoyed working indoors, but said it was difficult to manage "a lot of separate areas, and trying to utilize those areas the best possible way to keep the property happy and the artists happy."

Windle oversees the artist component of the events, including the artist application process. For every event, AFFPS advertises a call for artists and asks for photos and descriptions of their work. A group of jury members then evaluate the submissions and select the ones that work best for the venue.

"The caliber, the quality of work, is much higher," Windle said. "Each artist in their category is scored against the other applicants, so it also adds variability to every festival, because we never have the same pool of applications."

The open artist calls attract not only local Georgian artists, but artists from around the country. Peggy and Steve Kittleson of Woodland Designs, Inc. are from Iowa, and have been selling their handcrafted kaleidoscopes in arts festivals for 33 years. Despite their participation in "countless" shows, they admitted to never partaking in an event in a mansion quite like Callanwolde.

Many other artists, including painter Chris Strawbridge, believe that the festival attendees were truly what made the event special.

"I mean, it sounds hokey, but I love people coming by and chit chatting, talking to the other artists," Strawbridge said. "The people are great!"

In addition to the wide array of artists spread out among the mansion, the festival also featured special events that occurred concurrently with the art exhibitions. Live local musicians, such as Reed Ferguson and the VaudeVillains, played at the top of the grand staircase, and the Callanwolde Dance Ensemble presented a ballet demonstration.

For festivalgoers who desired a more exclusive, high-end event, the festival also included a VIP reception on Saturday night. Attendees experienced VIP access of the festival, **hors d'oeuvres** provided by Genki Sushi & Noodles and wine and cocktails.

Dennis believes that the Callanwolde Arts Festival could easily become an annual event for the AFFPS.

"This house comes to life with art," Dennis said. "And I have never seen Callanwolde this lively or people this excited to be here before."