

Party arty: Small local shows make buying, browsing more fun

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For artists in Naples, a desire to return to the past may be the best future. It has certainly helped to establish a very special — and very successful — type of art show.

Once a year, six local artists get together and host “Five Painters and a Potter,” a small art show that contrasts with the bigger, white-tent shows that are typically prominent in the Naples weekend landscape. In fact, these art soirees are becoming a celebratory way of business life for artists in Collier and south Lee County — several of the artists at the event Sunday will have also been at another Saturday night.

In all, six different art/entertainment happenings will give Southwest Florida art lovers plenty to explore, admire and possibly buy.



Photo by DAVID ALBERS, Daily News

Naples resident June Sochen, left, and Jane Wahl select a ceramic fish wall piece with at the 7th annual “5 Painters and a Potter” event at the Clay Place on Sunday, Mar. 1, 2009, in Naples. The event gathers six longtime artists in Naples, Jerry Vallez, Phil Fisher, Jim Rice, Paul Arsenault, Natalie Guess and Jeff Fessenden, for an afternoon of sharing their work, local music and socializing. David Albers/ Staff

Artists Phil Fisher, Natalie Guess, Paul Arsenault, Jerry Vallez, Jim Rice and Jeff Fessenden have one of the longest running soirees. They’ll be showing and selling their works in various mediums in a beautiful outdoor setting at The Clay Place for the sixth year. Located at Jim Rice’s pottery studio on Shadowlawn Drive just north of Davis Boulevard, its little haven of tropical landscaping provides a perfect backdrop for the artists to showcase their work in a Sunday show known as “Five Painters and a Potter:” Rice, the potter, is joined by the five local painters at his studio. The Clay

Place. Local bluegrass music and refreshments will add to the ambience.

The show “seemed like a natural evolution of our own individual careers,” said Rice. All of these artists have lived in Naples for more than 20 years. Back when they first began showcasing their

artwork in the area, the exhibits were always small and had a more close-knit atmosphere. “Five Painters and a Potter” has successfully attempted to recapture that essence, they say.

Rice’s studio is lush with the vegetation that thrives in Naples. Among the tropical plants, one can find his pottery pieces cleverly tucked in everywhere; his benches and sculptures seem to sprout from the ground just as naturally as the plants that grow there. Mosaic pathways link a few small structures — the studio, the gallery and the office — together.

Rice is known for his fish platters, available in numerous sizes and vibrant colors, and able to serve as anything from dinner plates to soap dishes. Along with the platters, Rice also creates decorative wall pieces, mugs, goblets, fountains, even fireplaces.

Fessenden produces fine art in trompe l’oeil mural painting and oils as well as humorous piece, such as the invitations to Five Painters and a Potter. It was his turn to create the piece, and: he caricatured all of the artists’ faces and placed them on a bright yellow background.

Watercolor artist Paul Arsenault will join the others at the event. His landscapes distill a Naples influence. But Arsenault’s world travels mean scenes from Hawaii, Nantucket, the Caribbean Islands, and even Vietnam complement his paintings of Florida palm trees and beaches and old Naples.

The natural environment of southwest Florida helps to influential Rice, as well as the other artists featured at this event, and another group who participate in the City Dock area’s “Art after Dark.”