



Mountain Artists Guild: 1949-2007

58 Years of Art in Prescott

On October 28, 1949, twenty-five people assembled in the home of Mabel Lawrence. They decided they would like to sketch, have weekly meetings, and meet in homes until they could find a suitable meeting place. They decided to have officers and dues. Today, the most familiar name of those present is George Phippen.

Many more members followed. What they all had in common was an interest in art. Formal training was varied with some artists, others just wanted to begin.

The Fifties

In 1950, the Guild's first meeting place was a drug store's back room. That same year, they had their first exhibit at the Prescott Library. And they drew up rules for the Plaza Art Show. The following year they took over management of the show. In 1953, the group chose Smoki Day in early August for the show. (Eventually, it became the second weekend in August.) In 1955, the managers of the St. Michael Hotel provided the setting for the establishment of the Prescott Art Center. In 1957, the Kiwanis Club expressed an interest in having an art center building in Prescott.

Two years later the University of Arizona offered summer extension courses in art and music. In conjunction, the Guild offered scholarships to local high school art students. The Yavapai County Hospital wanted the Guild to provide art for therapy. The real interest was in crafts, so they organized a weekly craft class.

The Sixties

By now the Guild membership was at 105, but they still had no permanent home. In spite of that their programs covered a variety of topics from weaving to the lost wax process. A local merchant donated a space in his store for the exhibit and sale of paintings, as did other businesses through the years. Meetings were held at the Sharlot Hall Museum. Mountain Artists Guild became officially incorporated on December 11, 1963, as a non-profit corporation.

In 1967, the MAG Auxiliary was formed—15 women interested in promoting art and helping the Guild financially. The group was offered a 99-year lease on the old Santa Fe Depot. Believing it was too much of an undertaking, they voted “no.” The Guild incorporated in 1968. The next year the Auxiliary became associated with a group now known as the Southwest Artists.

Guild members also participated in Spring Art Week each May with the MAG Annual Outdoor Art Festival on the Courthouse Square. (Eventually, it became Mother's Day weekend.) Money in the treasury stood at \$2,800 and dues had increased from \$1 to \$5.



The Seventies

Work continued on raising funds for a gallery as well as providing scholarships to local art students, this time Yavapai College students. The annual outdoor art festival, still held on Smoki Day, continued to attract ever-increasing crowds. In 1971, the Guild moved to the Armory, marking the beginning of a full-time gallery and the attendant task of finding volunteers to staff it.

In 1973, Jack-in-the-Box announced the property purchase and plans to demolish the Bashford House located on the southeast corner of Gurley and Pleasant. The community was up in arms and the house's owner offered it to the Sharlot Hall Museum with one stipulation—they had to move it. As fund-raising drives were organized, the Guild president negotiated a five-year lease of a portion of the house. In April of 1974, the house was on its way down the street to its new location. Work began on the renovation with a great deal of assistance from the Guild. It was two years before the Guild could move into new quarters, coinciding with the first Phippen Art Show. In June of 1976, the Eileen B. Seaman Estate presented to the Guild a check for \$9,663.64 as stipulated in her will.

The character of the Mountain Artists Guild began to change from artists getting together and learning from each other to an increased emphasis on selling their work. Many new members were unaware of the beginnings of the Guild, of the search for a suitable place to showcase their work, the workshops and demonstrations.

By 1979, the Annual Art Festival had grown to 300 exhibitors from all over the Southwest. Because some of them were obviously commercial, all craft work was juried before registration. That same year one wall of the Gallery in the Bashford House was devoted to the work of an individual artist. Each artist displayed for one month (Artist of the Month).

The Eighties

In 1980, the Guild began shifting its emphasis back to education and creativity. First a library was established. That summer the first workshop was offered. In August a small house on Willow Street became available; they leased it for a year. At last a place for the library to grow, a place for workshops to take place. And a way for the Guild to keep its tax-free status.

In 1981, after overcoming many obstacles, the Guild bought a house on the corner of Hillside and Ruth and began renovations. They held an open house in May in The Studio, more than 32 years after the establishment of MAG. And so began more classes and workshops, more meetings of artists and craftspeople. Membership stood at slightly less than 200.

Monthly shows of individual artists continued at the Bashford House as did the spring and summer fine arts and crafts fairs. In 1987 the lease for that location was expiring. The Guild requested rezoning of the studio on Ruth Street from residential to commercial to enable them to install a gift shop and continue sales of art work. The City Council considered and approved a new "arts and crafts" zoning.



The Nineties

Most of the Guild's activities continued—the monthly one-wall exhibit, the spring art show, the summer art show, demonstrations and workshops, scholarships. Also continuing was public debate about the value of the Courthouse Square events and their impact on local business.

In the mid-nineties, the Guild began awarding visual arts scholarships to talented high school and college students. The annual awards started at \$500, then rose to \$750, and finally to \$1,000. By 1998 the number of recipients had risen to five.

In May of 1999 one dream of MAG, that of a “proper” gallery, was fulfilled with the leasing of a property on Gurley Street near the Frame and I. A half-time manager was hired (later on to be full time) plus some paid help as well as volunteers. The gallery was a great place...openings, one-wall shows by members and all juried work. It was a success in every way except financially. The board voted to close the gallery at the end of the 2000 Christmas season to stem the losses being incurred.

The New Millennium

In the spring of 2001, Dick Marcusen, executor of the Dobbertine estate, offered MAG first right of refusal on a property adjacent to the MAG building on Ruth Street. The property was valued at \$79,000. The advisory committee recommended acceptance of the offer but the board elected to turn it down. Arrangements were made for the property to be offered to the Hillside Church of God located just east of the MAG facility. That group did purchase the property.

In this same time frame the Dobbertine estate made a gift of \$5,000 to the Mountain Artists Guild. The Dobbertines, long-time members of the Guild, had arranged for it to purchase the Ruth Street property, and were also instrumental in having an addition made to that facility.

The board explored the possibility of enlarging the Ruth Street building a second time. Plans were drawn and bids taken. Another option considered was to demolish the building and start over. In a planning session it was determined to upgrade the existing building—improvements to the restroom, office and exterior, and new carpet.

The Guild held its first poster contest in the summer of 2000 with several hundred posters printed from the artwork selected by the membership. These posters were featured at the two shows on the Courthouse Square. The 2004 poster made a total of five posters to date. This project has not been profitable so far, but is a distinct honor for the talented artist who is chosen and represents a quality activity of the Guild.

About this time the concept of a Prescott Community Art Center (PCAC) debuted accompanied by a conceptual building plan, construction estimate, and operating budget. Area art groups were invited to participate in the planning and operation of such a facility. There was some interest but little support for the idea.



In December of 2000, the Guild invited SCORE to assist with long-range planning. An advisory committee of prominent townspeople was organized and numerous meetings were held over the next few months. A search began for either a property to build on or an existing facility that would meet the projected need.

The Ruth Street property was evaluated through a study of comparable property sales and it was determined that its value was between \$110,000 and \$130,000. An agreement was reached with the Hillside Church of God to purchase the property at \$126,000 when the Guild was ready to relocate.

The search for a suitable site or building was commenced in earnest. In September of 2001, the Guild identified and seriously considered a property on Montezuma Street. It was decided to pass on that one due to issues with parking and handicap access.

In early March of 2002, an Alarcon Street property was identified as possibly meeting the present and near-term needs of the Guild. The facility had 7,000 square feet on two levels, the lower level being rented and providing some income. With terms being negotiable, the Guild paid for a property evaluation and, in due course, the membership voted to purchase the building. The Guild negotiated simultaneously with the church over the sale of the Ruth Street property.

Plans were immediately developed for the renovation of the Alarcon Street building, including a gallery, meeting rooms, offices, and library and rental space. The designs for this project were made by a local architect who was also a Guild member. The cost estimate for this renovation was approximately \$25,000 with the funds coming from the down payment on the Ruth Street property. Bids were taken, a contractor selected, and work was underway. The Guild moved from Ruth Street to Alarcon in June of 2002. With that move, the Guild changed from a club operation to a business.

The Gallery opened for business in November, 2002. The facility was open from 10 am through 3 pm five days a week, later extended to 7 days a week. The Gallery Committee continued to improve the quality and diversity of its inventory and showed a small profit each month.

The Guild expanded the number of classes and workshops and there was an ever-increasing demand for use of available space for both Guild-related and other activities.

January 2004 began without a renter for the downstairs space. After several months the Guild decided to modify the space for artist studios and an additional meeting/workshop room for use by Guild-sponsored activities. This reduced cash flow but did put almost the entire building in use for Guild purposes. At that same time work began on the development of an application to the Internal Revenue Service for tax exemption under the 501(c)(3) legislation. That application was completed and mailed in August of 2004. Tax exempt status was granted before the end of the year.



Since moving to the Alarcon facility the paid staff has undergone numerous changes and has been expanded to meet the ever-growing needs of the operation. At the beginning of 2005, the Gallery Committee became the overseer of the operations of the Mountain Artists Gallery and Gift Shop. Assistance was provided by two part-time employees with vast gallery experience.

The Guild operates as a non-profit 501(c)(3) while the Gallery is a taxable operation with any profits going to the Guild at year-end to provide scholarship funds for the advancement of the arts.

MAG's focus in 2006 was to increase its visibility within the community. A storage room was turned into new gallery space and now is home to the Masters Room, displaying art work by nationally and internationally known artists. The Guild also took part in a studio tour in conjunction with Smithsonian CultureFest 2006. For expanded advertising coverage, Gallery artist receptions are now held the fourth Friday of each month in conjunction with Prescott's 4th Friday Art Walk. An advertising contract with the local newspaper gave MAG greater visibility as did professionally printed postcards for each new exhibit. And last, but not least, the Guild held its first highly successful art auction to benefit the Scholarship Fund.

Mountain Artists Guild's Vision

The Vision of the Mountain Artists Guild Art Center and Gallery is to be:

- An imaginative, cohesive, volunteer-based art center
- An organization free of debt, with adequate physical plant and parking facilities
- A learning center for artists and artisans of all ages to enhance creativity and skills
- A gathering place for artists, artisans and community organizations for mutual interaction and mutual benefit
- A respected provider of exhibition opportunities both within and without the gallery space, for members and other artists and artisans
- A resource for artists and artisans for information and art enhancement
- A focus for the Prescott area to become an art destination, statewide

To be, thereby, an indispensable asset to the community at large.

Presently the Guild has nearly 300 members, and many of their creations can be found on display in the Gallery. Many professional artists present workshops to further hone the skills of area artists and artisans bringing true "works of art" to the Prescott area.

Mountain Artists Guild strives to create a must-visit gallery for those who desire original works of art at a reasonable price and to provide an organization that will ensure that Prescott is truly an art destination. At the same time, the Guild is helping local artists by showcasing their work and offering them the camaraderie of other artists meeting in a setting that is both challenging and encouraging.



The Guild sponsors two fine art and craft festivals each year—Mother’s Day weekend in May and the second weekend in and August—on the Courthouse Square. The general membership meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month, except December. Upcoming workshop artists give demonstrations of their work at that time. These are free and open to the public.

For workshop information, log onto www.mountainartistsguild.org or email the Guild at mag@northlink.com. To become a member of Mountain Artists Guild, pick up an application in the Gallery or in the Guild office, 228 N. Alarcon Street (near Sheldon) in Prescott, Arizona. The Guild telephone number is 928-445-2510; Gallery number is 928-776-4009.