Lace up your walking shoes for Manitou Paints!

By Rhonda Van Pelt

Manitou Springs has more artists than you can shake a paintbrush at and its residents and visitors are passionate about creative expression. Therefore, the city seems ideal for a plein air art event — a fancy way of saying that artists will be creating in the open air.

Tracy Miller, artist and owner of her namesake gallery on Ruxton Avenue, is spearheading the effort to bring artists and art lovers together through the inaugural Manitou Paints! plein air event on Oct. 21.

“The whole idea is just for people, as they’re walking around town, to just engage with an artist. It can be intimidating to walk into an art gallery, right? So, if they get to see the artists right out on the sidewalk creating, the artists can give them some information, tell them, ‘I’m represented here,’ ” Miller said. “They will sell the painting they’re working on, if people want to buy it. We'd love to do some commerce, obviously. But it’s really just to engage the public with the artists as they are painting in and around downtown.”

Miller has been brainstorming with people including Natalie Johnson, executive director of the Manitou Art Center and the Manitou Springs Creative District, and Leslie Lewis, executive director of the Manitou Springs Chamber of Commerce.

“We live in such an inspirational area and many of our artists thrive on this beauty. Plein air and our community are a natural fit,” Johnson said.

They soon realized they needed to start slowly, with artists already represented in Manitou galleries, and limit it to one day rather than the few days or a week other festivals present. The more ambitious plan would have entailed putting out a call for entries, finding lodging for the artists and lining up volunteers to help.

“Maybe later, because, honestly, we don’t know if this is going to be a big hit, if the artists are going to like doing it or if we’re going to like it,” Miller said.

Despite the "paints" part of the name, the artists are welcome to work in other media. “The reason we’re calling it ‘Manitou Paints!’ is because the whole plein air thing is sort of cemented in a lot of people’s minds. To me, it’s all encompassing as far as the event goes. And it just has a nice flow to it,” Miller said.

Artists won’t have to follow a particular theme or subject matter — for instance, the always picturesque Manitou architecture or the equally scenic mountains. They organizers are hoping to attract art lovers from Colorado Springs and surrounding areas, maybe a different demographic from the usual autumnal visitors. Whoever they are, whatever they’re looking for, Miller just wants them to enjoy talking to the artists.

And, about that “open air” environment: “If it’s a little chilly, that’s OK. I just don’t want it downright cold or snowing or raining. Hopefully, we’ll have a decent day,” she said.

October is Arts Month, a Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region initiative to celebrate the performing and visual arts. Each week, the Bulletin will publish a story that focuses on a particular art form appearing on the Arts Month schedule. The first week highlights visual arts. Information: www.culturaloffice.org or www.peakradar.com.

Coni Grant, whose art appears at the Tracy Miller Gallery, loves plein air painting.

SPONSORSHIP
If you would like to become a Manitou Paints! sponsor, contact Tracy Miller at tracymillerfineart@gmail.com.

PARTICIPANTS
Participating galleries and confirmed artists are:
- Cherokee’s of Manitou, 351 Manitou Ave., Sharon Dahlen; Commonwheel Artists Co-op, 102 Cañon Ave., Jean Cuchiaro, Claudia Dimidik and Lynn Lee;
- Darpino Studio Gallery, 934 Manitou Ave. (Spa Building), Fred Darpino and Gene Sanchez;
- Green Horse Gallery, 729 Manitou Ave., Ken and Tina Reisterer;
- Manitou Art Center, 513/515 Manitou Ave., Vince Coleman, Neil Fenton, Becky Pontz and Wanda Veltkamp;
- The Ruxton-area galleries: Fare Bella, 14 Ruxton Ave., and Tracy Miller Gallery, 16 Ruxton Ave., will host Kearney Coret, Nancye Culbroth, Mark Day, Tim Deibler, David Gonzales, Coni Grant, Buffalo Kaplinak, Terri Sanchez and Garrett Schuh.

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