

Furchgott Sourdiffe Gallery
celebrating 25 years exhibiting art in Vermont

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Nurturing artists and art lovers have been Joan Furchgott's passion ever since she and Brad Sourdiffe, her husband and business partner opened the gallery in Shelburne Vermont that shares their name. While the gallery is celebrating 25 years of exhibiting artists, in fact, these two entrepreneurs have been a couple for 40 years and have worked together professionally for 33 of those years which helps to explain their devoted following among the artists and clients that they serve.

To acknowledge this anniversary, Furchgott planned a three-phase exhibition starting with **Looking Back** honoring 17 of the original artists who began showing their work back in 1991 in the now transformed gallery of what had been the original, well established Shelburne Frame and Art. Two of those artists, Jim Giddings and Petria Mitchell have gone on to open their own gallery; Mitchell - Giddings Fine Arts in Brattleboro. This collegial, supportive atmosphere seems to be indicative of Vermont's cultural life, very unlike the often cutthroat competition that exists in places like New York, Miami, or Los Angeles.

Being Present is the aptly titled second part of this exhibit cycle featuring 26 artists whose work is currently represented by the gallery. As stated on the Furchgott Sourdiffe website "The title references what the creative process is about: what we as individuals strive for in artistic endeavors as well as in the fine art of living, exemplified by being 'in the moment' and seeking out the essence of what is within us and around us. Being present." The cozy and welcoming impression upon entering the light-filled, charming Queen Anne Victorian at 86 Falls Road makes it easy to "be present". Visitors are encouraged to "just browse." There is no pressure, no feeling that if you are not a serious collector you are trespassing. No single style or medium predominates. The work ranges from the bold abstractions of Gail Salzman to the calm quiet of a *Late Autumn Farm* scene painted by John Olson and if you are so inclined, there are also cases of beautiful jewelry, original ceramics, glassware, and textiles.

In spite of the eclectic nature of the art represented (Furchgott said "I go with my gut" when trying to decide whether to carry an artists work), one senses an underlying authenticity in every piece. Each artist knows their craft and that knowledge seems clearly on display. There is also a wide price range starting at the top with the extraordinary textile and stitchery images of Dianne Shullenberger which are like magical little worlds that leave you wondering "how does she do that?" or alternatively the delicate, expressive but more straightforward botanically inspired drawings of Miriam Adams.

Furchgott does not feel obligated to be constantly in search of the next trendy thing in order to appease a clientele that is more interested in art collecting as a financial investment rather than buying work that fills their personal aesthetic needs. She says she

is sometimes asked by a potential buyer, “What’s good?” She tells them that all art is “really subjective.” The values are based on certain people’s opinions, and their opinions won’t help you to know what you feel comfortable with hanging on the walls of your home. She encourages new collectors to exercise their own judgment, to “learn to look and to enjoy looking”.

While the majority of Furchgott Sourdiffe’s artists and clients are from Vermont, some avid collectors come from out of state, mostly every summer to see what is new or to revisit some favorite artists work. Unlike most traditional big-time New York galleries that pretty much close their doors in summer and move out to The Hamptons, Furchgott said this July was one of the best months in overall sales that the gallery has had. But in leaner times it has been the couple’s framing and art restoration business that has taken up any slack from the sale of art. These were the original talents, along with their art training that brought the couple together. They started a business specializing in custom craftsmanship out of their home in the little hamlet of Buels Gore, Vermont where they restored pieces for the Vermont Statehouse and the Hood Museum in Hanover, New Hampshire. In 1983 Brad Sourdiffe started working for Shelburne Frame and Art doing high-end custom framing. Joan Furchgott joined him in 1990 and the following year they bought the business. They now live in Lincoln, while the restoration and framing happen in a well organized but crammed full workshop on the first floor right behind the gallery exhibit space. This makes it very convenient if a client decides they want to have a painting framed before bringing it home.

There is only one other full-time employee, Lara Maloy, who answered an ad about ten years ago and has been with the business ever since. She was a fast learner and has become the primary person doing framing, while she also helps out in the gallery.

At the time of this writing, Joan Furchgott was planning the final exhibit in the gallery’s anniversary trilogy, titled ***Looking Forward***, tentatively scheduled to open mid-September and to run through the end of October. She is hoping to present new work by some of her current artists and new discoveries as well. Because Furchgott does not require artists who show with the gallery to sign an exclusivity contract, it is the best of all possible worlds, especially for artists who are in the early stages of building a career. They need the flexibility of showing their work in as many outlets as possible in order to reach a receptive audience. This attitude of “sharing the wealth” of creativity among art dealers seems to be a uniquely Vermont phenomena. Iron-clad contracts between artist and dealer were more the norm in the past, and tales of “stealing artists” or artists infidelity to certain dealers are rife in the international art scene. Furchgott’s relationships with artists are characterized by mutual accommodation based on trust. She understands there has to be flexibility when working with artists. Some are prolific, while others take years to produce only a few pieces. She is also open to showing wildly different work from the same artist, even exhibiting these pieces side by side. Such was the case in the ***Being Present*** exhibition with Philip Hagopian. His strange but beautifully crafted relief, *Resisting the Process* hung next to a more traditionally figurative oil painting titled *Humans in Summer*. Some dealers would not take such a risk, but Furchgott was confident that the work would speak for itself.

Anniversaries are excellent opportunities for taking stock, assessing where you've been, where you are and where you want to be. Right now Joan Furchgott "feels great" about the future. "We want people to care about art because we care. We care about the artists too!" That caring has produced twenty-five successful years and with this positive outlook, ten years from now we should be celebrating another milestone with Furchgott Sourdiffe.

By Cynthia Close

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