

The International Alternative

Written by Margaret Evans

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The entrepreneurial students of Technical College of the Lowcountry are pleased to invite you to the International Alternative on Friday, November 14 from 6 – 9 pm for an art exhibition featuring the work of C. Steve Johnson.

The students have produced prints and cards from original works for sale to support the entrepreneurial club at TCL. The exhibition will include the original paintings on display and showcase the students' abilities to implement a start-up business. Located at 1815a Boundary Street in Beaufort, The International Alternative is an art gallery and exhibition space created to highlight creativity and community with global awareness and camaraderie.

Armed with the desire to be an artist, Steve Johnson's development began as a sculpture's apprentice for Professor Elden Tefft at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, KS in 1987. At 18 years of age, he rushed to the foundry to focus. Under Tefft's guidance, he understood form, work ethic, and to learn by doing. In 1989, Johnson enrolled in the Kansas City Art Institute. The technical knowledge passed on from professor Tefft, specifically, the operation of machines and hands-on building secured a job as the woodshop technician at KCAI. This job supported him through the four year BFA program. More importantly, this was an invaluable experience, as it required listening to students and solving problems, the secret to being a good teacher. Johnson graduated on the Dean's List from the Kansas City Art Institute and took from the experience that each artist must find his or her own way.

He has been fortunate to travel to England, the Czech Republic, and Chile to live and exhibit artwork. He also spent 12 years in New York City where he established an art and performance space called Chez Mes, for Chez Mes Amis. Through both his travels and managing an arts venue, he realized art objects and events are resolved by the dialogue that resonates from person to person. This conversation builds bonds to uplift and support community, perhaps the real significance to art.

As a young artist and new arrival to New York City, Steve had an unfortunate bicycle accident. For months following, physical activities were limited and the recovery was slow. Because it was difficult to make things at first, he considered the importance of bringing people together as an art form. Cooking, dancing, and bonfires were now the raw materials for making a creative experience. Although he did not understand it at the time, the accident gave him the opportunity to grow and chart a pursuit in community building. If art objects were the residue of a creative act, the artist's intention in making a painting or a poem was certainly to communicate with others. Communication can take many forms. The word means to exchange ideas, messages, or information. So, the accident made way for an epiphany and with it, a foundation in artistic expression and education as a shared experience.

For three years Johnson has worked at the Technical College of the Lowcountry in Beaufort, S.C. As student support services counselor, he helps to guide students. He concentrates on assisting students to excel in their education. In addition, he provides cultural stimulus in the form of field trips, lectures, and by curating art at the school. From his perspective, the key element of the work is to encourage dialogue among the students and faculty to enhance the overall cultural climate of the institution. He continues his art practice with focus. Johnson exhibits work several times a year in different venues travelling to New York and Miami. He donated art to raise money for The National Alliance for Mental Illness and for the past five years donated work to support the Lotus House Women's Homeless Shelter in Miami. These exhibitions were curated and held at the Martin Margulies warehouse in Miami and generate working capital for the shelter.

Currently, he is enrolled in the Masters of Arts Administration at The Savannah College of Art and Design. He is committed to developing ideas about art practice and how the arts are integral to benefit the community. As an artist and educator, his aim is to connect the dots between making art and making an enriching experience that encourages dialogue between different people with varied interests and occupations.

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