

Creating Art in the Time of the Coronavirus

Written by Mindy Lucas

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When businesses along Bay Street began to shut down from the coronavirus earlier this spring, Beaufort artist Mary Grayson Segars (left) continued to go to her studio at Atelier on Bay and paint.

“It was very peaceful up there,” she said, recalling those first few days after the second-floor gallery locked its doors to the outside world.

As other Atelier artists like Segars continued to show up to work in the massive warehouse-like space, a silence soon fell over the building.

Gone were the creaking floorboards from foot traffic moving through the gallery. Absent was the street noise from traffic on a normally bustling Bay Street just below.

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But it didn't bother Segars who does a lot of commissioned portrait work as well as landscapes and other Lowcountry scenes. She was used to working alone in the building, with only the occasional client or visitor passing through. Not even the thought of a resident ghost rumored to haunt the space bothered her.

"I would just turn my music up really loud if I was up there by myself," she said.

Still, something had changed. As if another more menacing spectacle was lingering in the air, Segars soon decided to pack up and head for home.

Asked why she made the switch, Segars said, "That's a good question."

"I think I just realized there was no reason to drive down there when I could set up something at home," she said.

Like Segars, many artists suddenly found themselves painting and working in relative isolation after the pandemic hit, cut off from the in-person contact a gallery showroom can offer, or having to adapt to the effects of a state-mandated shutdown in some way.

While the upside may be having more time or the space to focus on work, the downside can actually translate into lost sales or missed opportunities to promote one's work.

"We had to get very creative," said Mary Thibault from her Bay Street gallery recently.

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