



Arthur Roger gallery celebrates 45 years with must-see exhibition

150 works by 100 artists crowd the flagship Julia Street gallery

BY DOUG MACCASH | Staff writer Oct 6, 2023



Gallery owner Arthur Roger, seen here with a self-portrait by post-modernist Deborah Kass, is celebrating 45 years in the contemporary art business.

(Photo by Doug MacCash NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

The 150 artworks in the Arthur Roger gallery 45th anniversary show aren't arranged in chronological order. And they're not arranged according to style, subject matter, whether the artists are local or from out of town, or alive or dead.

The paintings, sculpture and photographs just seem arbitrarily scattered around the rooms, as if they were guests at a crowded house party, mingling and striking up random conversations with one another.

As gallery founder Arthur Roger put it, the show was arranged "organically." The approach befits the organic growth of the New Orleans art scene since 1978, when Roger's first showroom opened on Magazine Street, and the evolution of what would become New Orleans' premier contemporary art gallery.

Roger, who grew up in the Ninth Ward, describes those first days as a gamble. He said he was "a kid with no direction" until he got a job working in a French Quarter art gallery.

When he set out to have a gallery of his own, he borrowed the money to open the place from his mom, who mortgaged her house to make his dream possible. Looking back, he said, to have asked his mom to risk her future on his feels a bit "selfish."

It was a "Field of Dreams," idea, he said. But since there wasn't much interest in contemporary art at the time, it was very possible that if he built it, nobody would come.

But with Mom's investment on the line, Roger said to himself, "I gotta make this work."

And so he did. Timing turned out to be on his side. As Poydras Street office buildings grew, so did corporate art purchases. That kept the gallery afloat as Roger introduced New Orleans collectors to the works of some of the most happening artists of the era.

Roger always had a great eye. He represented outstanding locals, like John Scott, George Dureau, Willie Birch, Bob Gordy, Lin Emery, Jacqueline Bishop and Gene Koss.

Regional artists like Doug Bourgeois, Clyde Connell, and Francis Pavy were also part of the picture. And so were national stars, including Robert Colescott, Lesley Dill, Jim Surles and Deborah Kass.

Now, he said, “People feel more ownership with art, and are more comfortable walking in.”



The eclectic ‘45th’ exhibit at Arthur Roger gallery is crowded with 150 works by 100 artists.

(Photo by Doug MacCash NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

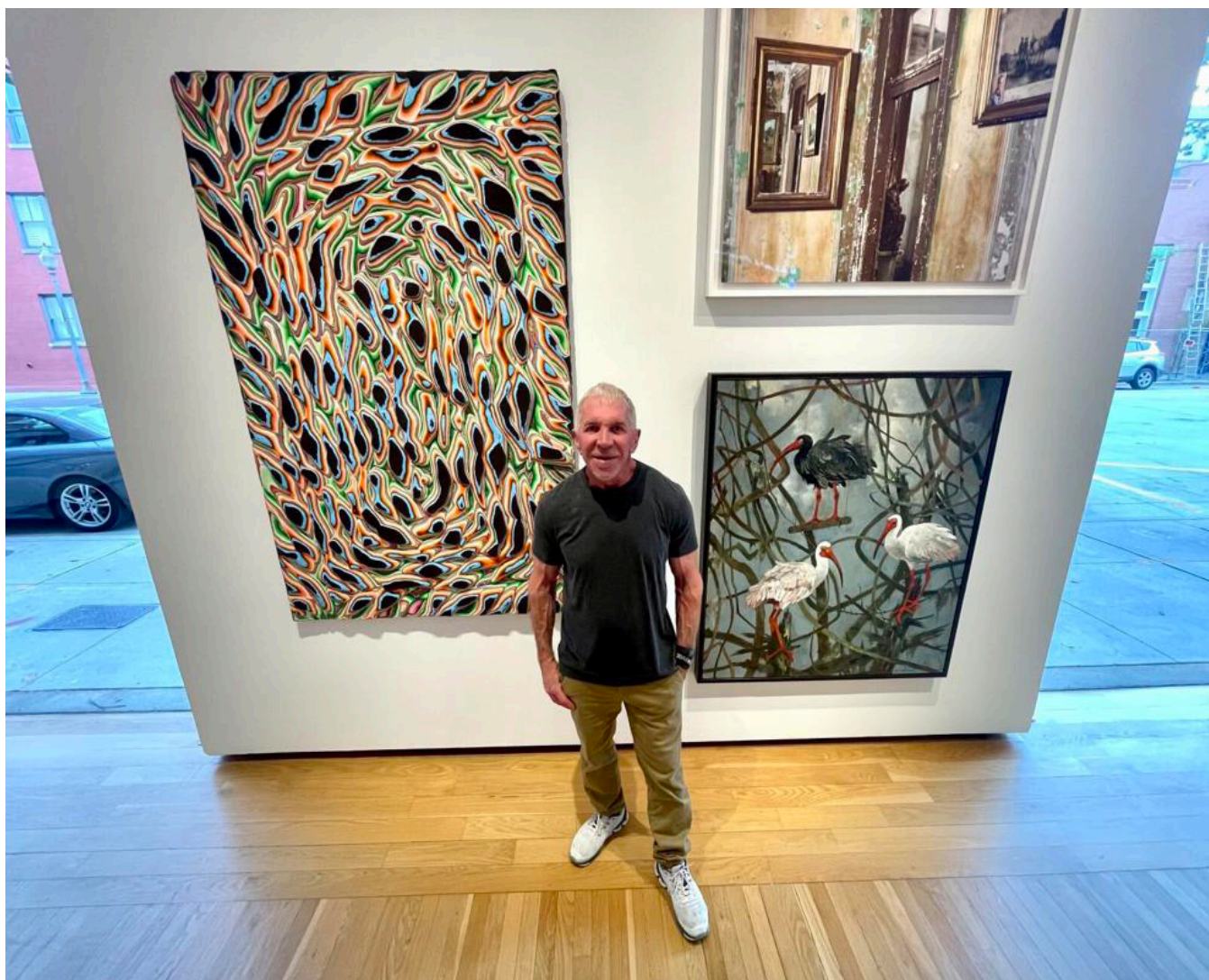
As he meandered the gallery earlier this week, Roger noted that, as the decades have slipped by, several of the early gallery artists have passed away, and others have ceased making art.

Roger said he can’t imagine leaving the profession he loves. “I don’t see that I’m ever going to retire,” he said. The gallery “still has a role to play to further the New Orleans art scene.”

“45th” is certainly the must-see exhibit during Saturday’s (Oct. 7) Art For Arts’ Sake coordinated gallery openings centered on Julia and Magazine streets. Roger said he expects many of the artists, old and new, to attend the reception from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. at 432 Julia St.

The exhibit will continue through the fall, with a closing reception on Jan. 6.

For more information, visit arthurrogergallery.com.



Gallery owner Arthur Roger is celebrating 45 years in the contemporary art business. Roger is seen here with works by Holton Rower (left) Alec Soth (top right) and John Alexander (bottom right).

(Photo by Doug MacCash NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

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