

The Art Stall Gallery

Forty years of doing something right

By **RENA LANGILLE**

Forty years ago, on a cool, overcast February day in 1965, the curtain across space No. 95 in the Economy Arcade was raised to reveal a bright new business - the



The Art Stall's first birthday party in 1966.

Art Stall. In a location outside DeLaurenti's in the Economy Arcade, 14 artists had put together a retail gallery to sell their works.

This ambitious group had splintered off from another arts organization and decided to open a gallery of their own work. The spirited artists met on the second floor of Manning's Restaurant (now Lowell's) to form a business plan and make up a roster.

After negotiating a lease, members got out the elbow grease and went to work transforming an old egg stall into a freshly painted art space. They scrounged used carpet from Frederick and Nelson, and hung peg board. Downstairs, Herb Chilcotte had a second-hand furniture store. He

donated a used desk and, thinking about how to install a barrier in front, whimsically brought in an old altar rail. A notebook was used for recording transactions.

1965 was a spirited time to open. The City of Seattle proposed to raze market structures, where farmers had sold produce since 1907, in order to plant high rises. Activist Architect Victor Steinbrueck's group, "Friends of the Market" fired up a protest to preserve the public legacy.

Riled about the possible destruction of the many small entrepreneurial businesses, and before they officially opened, Art Stall members got petitions signed and marched on City Hall. In the chill of October they organized a paint-out, producing work for a fund-raising auction to support Friends of the Market.

There was a huge public outcry and a well armed publicity campaign. The protestors prevailed. Ironically, after the dust settled, the City did a turn-around and set up a massive Market restoration project.

I asked Ellen Andersen, the doyen and last

founding member of the gallery, what she thought about the 40th anniversary. She wistfully told me she had mixed feelings, wondering where all those days went. She has a passion for the Market, and many wonderful anecdotes to tell.

There was once a man who used to stand at a nearby farm counter talking to people all day long, selling dried-out potatoes and squash. After noticing him for months and wondering what kind of farmer he could be, selling such wrinkled vegetables, the truth became known - he was a *bookie*.

She remembers opening the mesh curtain to the smell of urine, and the drug dealing inside the Arcade, but there are mostly wonderful memories, especially of the regular visitors throughout the years.

One elderly man used to bring fresh tomatoes, another brought coffee and one used to stop by to photograph new members.

Nancie Gee put several photos of Art Stall artists in her book "Reflections in Pike Place Markets." The area around the stair to Down Under was an informal meeting place for a number of older gents who met daily to socialize. The spot was known affectionately as the "Poor Man's Country Club." Some would stop by the Art Stall to chat. All of these people added to the camaraderie of the Market; vendors and local visitors knowing each other by name and disposition.

Membership of 12 to 14 artists is maintained. They are 40 to more than 80 years old. Requirements to join are simple: Members must have a passion for the market; they must be able to get along well with the group; and they must be able to produce quality original art works.

Backgrounds of the present group vary. One studied at the Sorbonne and another came from Boeing's commercial art division. Another is a former Medicare/Medicaid administrator who plays the string bass and was a physical therapist. And - close to my heart - is a member who is a fourth generation Seattleite!

Every morning during business hours a different Art Stall artist comes in and raises the curtain. The artist of the day posts their name, puts out the signs, and sweeps up. Most work two to three days a month.

Once a month one member's work is featured on the East wall. Works are in many different media. There are wonderful watercolors, oils, acrylics, sumi, pen and ink, postcards and note cards - many of which feature Northwest scenes.

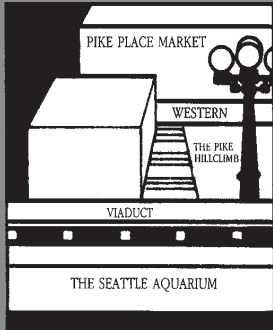
The view out the entrance has changed from one long low produce counter, open to Pike Street, to a colorful variety of small entrepreneurial businesses.

A bright and bubbly Betsy McPhaden told me that "it's so inspiring to work with people who enjoy their craft, are such professionals and bring such joy to other people with their work." She says she has never worked with another group that cooperates so well and happily pitches in with help when needed.

A kick-off for the fortieth anniversary celebration is planned for June 7, when members will hold a paint-out around the Market. Look for the bright balloons near each artist. The resulting art works will be framed and hung in the gallery from June 24 to July 29.

Stop by to say hello and peruse the art. There are many patrons who collect art by particular artists, so if you see something that may be a little beyond your budget, just ask about the lay-away plan. Hours are Mon. - Sun. 10 - 6, through June, July, and August.

Forty years after its inception, the Art Stall has fresh paint and a newer desk. The



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