

## Ventura ArtWalk starts Friday showcasing over 500 regional artists

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VENTURA, Calif. - Downtown Ventura will come alive with color and art this weekend as the annual Ventura ArtWalk brings together more than 500 regional artists and celebrates the city's thriving arts community.

The popular, free outdoor arts festival hits the streets on Saturday and Sunday, with thousands of people expected to view and purchase artwork, photographs, jewelry, wood creations and other fine art pieces.

Visitors can tour artists' studios around downtown and along Ventura Avenue and step inside portable art studios created inside PODS containers.

On Friday from 6:30 to 9 p.m., the City of Ventura will host an ArtWalk Collector's Reception in City Hall at 501 Poli St. An art exhibit will feature more than 90 works that patrons can buy so long as the pieces remain on display during ArtWalk.

The reception will kick off with Ventura Mayor Cheryl Heitmann honoring the 2015 ArtWalk Artist of Distinction, sculptor Michele Chapin. It will include hors d' oeuvres, music, a no-host cocktail bar and a performance by ALOFT Dance Theatre. Tickets are \$20 in advance or \$25 at the door.

During ArtWalk, visitors can satisfy the palate by participating in Bowl Hop. Visitors can buy a handcrafted ceramic bowl and fill it with samplings from participating Ventura restaurants. Each bowl costs \$25 and benefits ArtWalk Ventura and Project Understanding's food pantry. Bowls are available at selected sites.

This year, ArtWalk features "Havana to Ventura," a series of special events and exhibits, the highlight of which is a public mural that was the collaboration of renowned Cuban artist Pedro Pulido and Ventura muralist MB Hanrahan. Their multi-paneled mural, at 50 W. Main St., combines colorful imagery from both countries and reflects cultural elements shared by Ventura and Cuba: dancing, music, cars, the ocean and nature.

The two artists met briefly in 1997 at Art City, where Pulido spent nine months as an artist in residence. ArtWalk Committee Co-Chairwoman Sue Pollack said their reunion was timely in the wake of the United States and Cuba moving toward a restoration of diplomatic relations.

Pollack envisioned the public art project, named “Havana to Ventura, City to City,” when she was with Pulido and other Cubans in Havana when President Obama and Cuban President Raúl Castro first signaled sweeping changes to U.S.-Cuba relations.

“On a bus trip to a hotel in a beautiful square, we listened to Raul’s speech and our guide translated,” Pollack recalled. “Right when we got off the bus, church bells rang over the square and about a hundred pigeons flew in sync around and around high above our heads.

“I envisioned the mural at that time and spoke to my other co-chairs, Kevin Clerici and Mary Perez, with the idea of having Pedro and MB collaborate,” she added. “I have seen Pedro’s murals in Cuba, and they are bold, political, strong and wonderful. MB has those same characteristics.”

Another feature of this year’s ArtWalk are the 15 pre-fabricated PODS containers that will showcase a variety of artwork — from paintings to sculpture to performance art — and connect local artists and galleries throughout the streets of downtown and Ventura’s Westside Cultural District.

The mini-galleries will put the focus on the artists, in contrast to the early years of ArtWalk when “artists often were shoe-horned into the back of a retail store where the artwork was overshadowed by store merchandise,” said Kevin Clerici, executive director of Downtown Ventura Partners.

The final three PODS containers will be installed on Saturday at 7 a.m. at California and Main streets.

Ventura graphic designer Ben Blanchard will feature his project, “Alive Ventura,” a 12-foot exhibition space showcasing illustrations and words on digitally designed and printed vinyl.

Blanchard said the vacant storefronts and buildings and other “dead space” that have become commonplace sights in downtown Ventura inspired his work.

He said he placed more than 50 posters around town asking people how they would change the city. Drawing on these responses, he will illustrate over black-and-white photographs of “dead space” in Ventura.

“These illustrations push the bounds of what people would really do with these spaces,” Blanchard said. “We want people to see our exhibit and walk away questioning these spaces and starting to dream about how they can change the city.”

Another addition to this year’s event is a plein air art contest. Artists from Los Angeles to Ventura were invited to paint scenes and icons of Ventura and submit their work to be judged at 1 p.m. Friday in the Bell Arts Factory community room. Artist Ann Lofquist will select the best painting from more than 100 entries.

Some 19 plein air artists will be selling their paintings in the community room all weekend. On Saturday from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m., these artists will paint a “quick draw” on a three-block portion of Ventura Avenue, and the public is invited to vote for the best painting.

For more details about ArtWalk venues and events, visit [artwalkventura.org](http://artwalkventura.org)

[http://www.vcstar.com/entertainment/events/cover-art-walk\\_39788683](http://www.vcstar.com/entertainment/events/cover-art-walk_39788683)