

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Inaugural 'Art St. Croix' Showcase To Benefit School Art Programs

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In an effort to provide art classes in St. Croix's public and private schools with much-needed supplies, local artists have joined forces for the first annual *Art St. Croix* benefit that will kick-off on Friday, March 27 at the Top Hat Gallery located on Company St. in Christiansted.

The idea for the three-day showcase originated after St. Croix artist, Lucien Downes, visited a selection of schools on the island to share his work with youngsters.

"I've been to a few schools on the island to do talks and they have no supplies," Downes said. "They get supplies from the government, but if you have 120-140 kids, and you

need crayons, and they give you only four boxes of crayons, how is that going to work?"

The experience, Downes said, compelled him to take action.

"Being an artist myself, I know how it is when you don't have supplies," he said. While Downes pointed out that he has been fortunate to have the means to purchase the supplies he needs, he empathized with artists who haven't.



he said, adding, "This benefit is to

A line up of the artists and

events of Art St. Croix benefit

Soon after the idea came to him, Downes said he spoke with Hanne Rasmussen, Top Hat's owner.

"She was all for it and she said 'let's do it,'" Downes said.

The showcase, which Downes planned in the space of one month, will feature a variety of artwork and small gift items for sale.

"Painting, photography, anything you can think of," Downes said of the items that will be available for purchase. "We pulled together almost all of the artists and photographers on St. Croix to do this show."

In fact, Downes said he reached out to 40-45 artists and asked them to participate.

"They know what it's for and they're actually pitching in to help out a good cause," he said.

One such person, Downes said, is photographer Charlene Springer, who will be showing her work for the first time.

"She does a lot of landscape photography, so she will put in a few pieces. It's her first time showing and I think it's going to be great," Downes said, adding, "We're going to have a lot of great people and a lot of great work."

Downes explained that a portion of the evening's proceeds will be used to order art supplies in bulk and have them shipped to St. Croix. When asked how soon he expects the items to be distributed to the schools, Downes said anywhere from one-and-a-half months.

"I'm going to make sure they get it in there before the end of the school year and that it transfers over to the next school year," he said. "And depending on how this show goes, we might do it again next year."

And, Downes has an ambitious goal of supplying all of St. Croix's schools with the art supplies.

"I've called different schools and the majority of them need glue, construction paper, drawing paper, sketch pads, things like that," Downes explained.

He went on to explain that schools will be given supplies based on need.

"Most of the schools that have more of a higher-bracket income will need less supplies than those that have a lower-bracket income, " Downes said. "So, we're going to focus first on the lower-bracket income schools and then deal with the higher-bracket schools after."

With that, Downes said he believes a showcase like this will push local artists to produce "their best work."

"We need to start making a standard in art because we do these small shows, but we're not really pushing the artists to bring out their best work," he said. "I think that with a showcase like this, with the competition, artists are going to start to push themselves to the next level, and that's what you want."

"It's a good cause and it needs to be done," Downes added. "I think that we're too dependent on the government to continuously help us, when people who are in private industry, that's what they're supposed to be doing as well."

The show will run March 27-29 on both floors of the Top Hat Gallery. The opening reception is on March 27 from 5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. Showtimes for the remaining days are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Image Credit: Art @ Top Hat