

A PLACE WHERE THE ARTS THRIVE



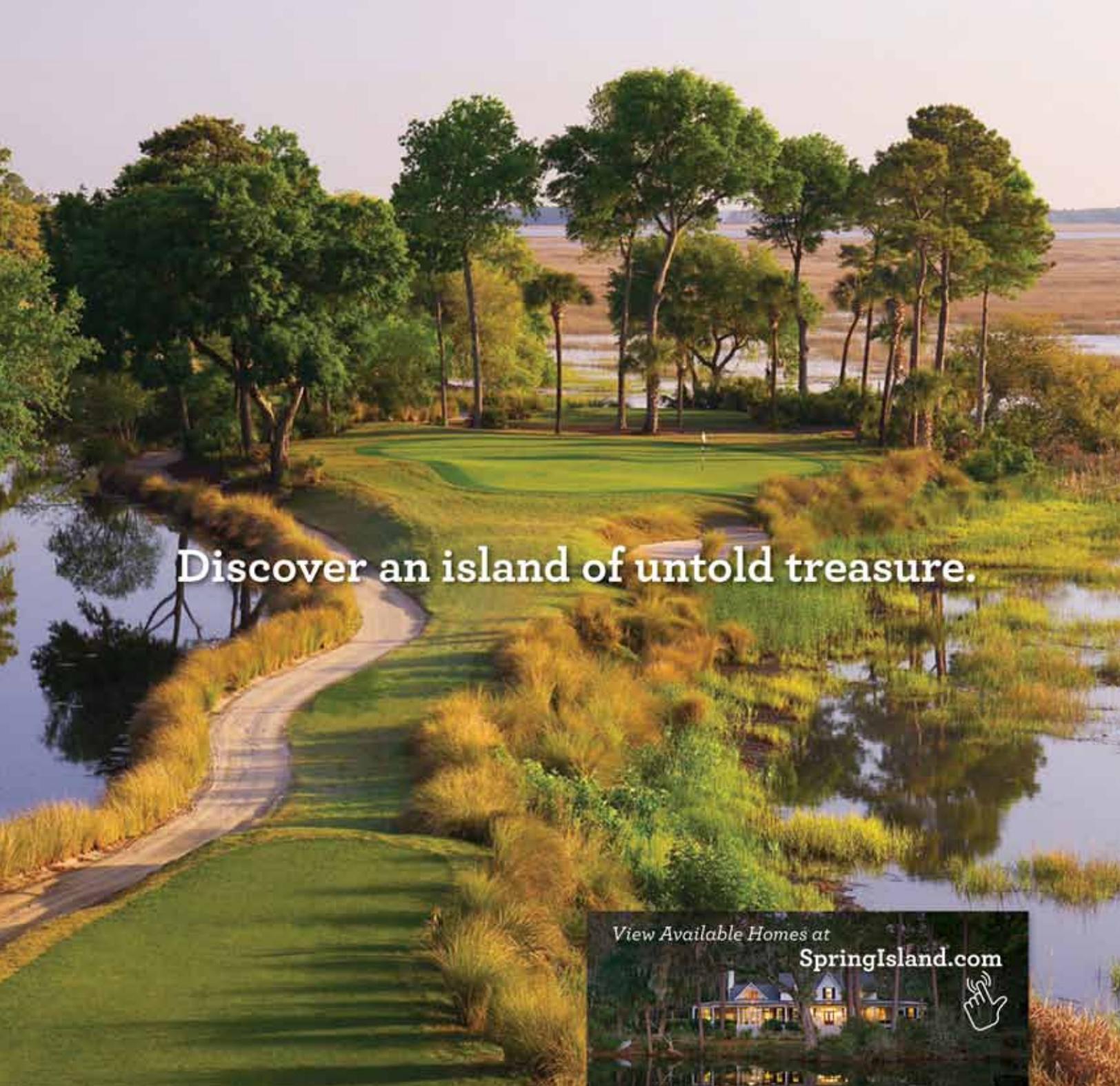
By: Lark G. Smith and R. Stewart

Imagine packing a lunch and nice bottle of wine in your sachel, throwing an easel and the strap on your paint box over your shoulder and taking a walk along a wooded trail until you reach a place that strikes you for its natural beauty. The sun and the billowing clouds in the sky are perfect, and the dappled light cast through the boughs of the surrounding centuries old oaks with all that they have seen. As you settle down and listen you begin to notice so much more. Sounds of nature placing one in awe and in touch with the inner feelings that it brings, cleansing the mind and senses. The excitement of the unknown wells-up as exhilaration creeps in as you think about what will be your first color, your first stroke, the image your are going to place on that blank canvas.

En plein air is a French expression which means "in the open air" and is particularly used to describe the act of painting outdoors, which is also called *peinture sur le motif* ("painting of the object(s) or what the eye actually sees") in French. In painting, "sur le motif" reproduces the actual visual conditions seen at the time of the painting. This contrasts greatly with painting according to studio or academic rules, which creates a per determined look. "En plein air" can also be used to describe other activities where a person partakes in an

outdoor environment, as waiting for the right moment to snap that image recording a second in time and what the lens of the camera might capture, or writing a poem with musings of your stream of consciousness recorded in a leather bound book

Artists have long painted outdoors, but in the mid-19th century working in natural light became particularly important for the Barbizon school, the Hudson River School and the impressionists. The popularity of painting *en plein air* increased and gained greater common popularity in the 1840s with the introduction of paints in tubes as previously, painters made their own paints by grinding and mixing dry pigment powders with linseed oil. The "Box Easel" or field easel, was invented during this period. It is uncertain who developed it first, but one can be sure he was a lover of nature and art. These highly portable easels, with telescopic legs and built-in paint box and its palette, allowed treks into the forest and along the river banks less onerous. French Impressionist painters such as Monet, Pissarro, and Renoir advocated *en plein air* painting, and much of their work was done outdoors, in the diffuse light sometimes provided by shadows and other times provided by a large white umbrella.



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An abstract painting by Brian Rutenberg, featuring thick, textured brushstrokes in shades of yellow, green, blue, and red, with a prominent dark, vertical stroke on the left side.

BRIAN RUTENBERG

A landscape painting by Michael Karas, depicting a red barn and a white fence in a rural setting, with a field in the foreground and trees in the background, rendered in a soft, impressionistic style.

MICHAEL KARAS

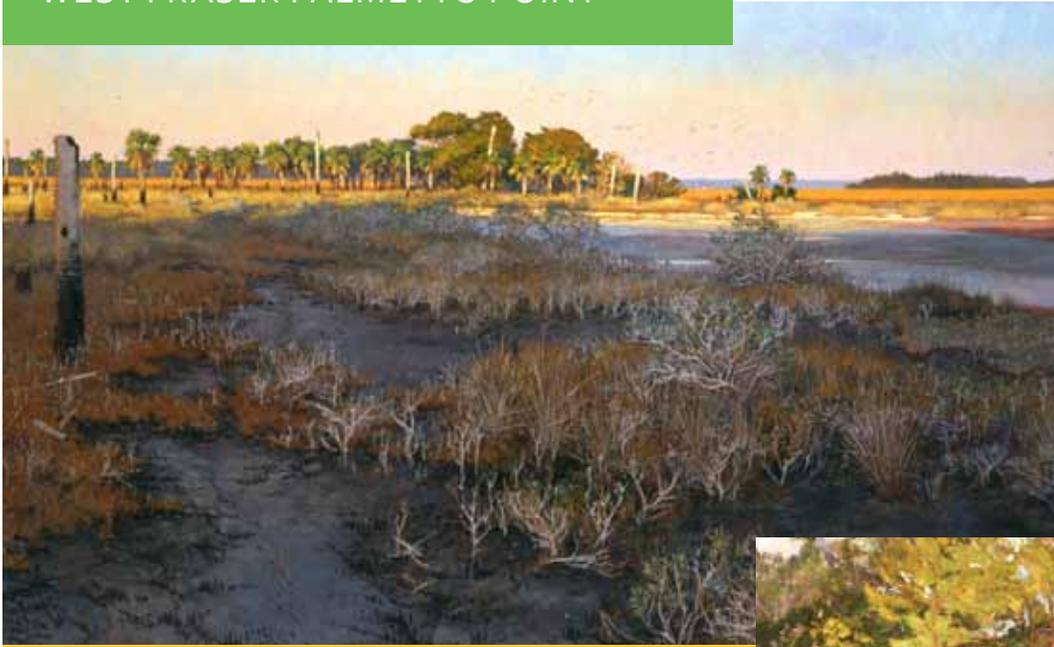
From the early stages of the development process, Betsy Chaffin, Founder of the Spring Island Trust, believed it was important to make sure that life on the island was centered around a true sense of community and she felt that the arts should be an integral part of that concept. Nature, man and art are intertwined. With that in mind, in 1991 she began inviting artists to come to Spring Island as an artist retreat. This effort became the Visiting Artist program and continued as a program of the Spring Island Trust, expanding to include natural history, history, music, and other cultural activities. Today, this Trust program is an important part of the lives of those who live on this wonderful private island.

Over 150 artists from around the country, who work in many mediums, have visited the land experienced its beauty, found rejuvenation, and gained inspiration for their art. There is no better place for inspiration than the celebrated environs of nearby Spring Island. The list of artists who have been invited over the years includes not only en plein air nature and landscape painters, but photographers, ceramicists, book makers, paper makers and sculptors.

Over the years, workshops have provided challenges for members who participate. Not only have there been techniques to learn but unusual experiences to be shared by both visiting artists and students. There have been the odd hours for workshops such as midnight moth-collecting sessions with Joe Sheerer, break-of-dawn starts to catch the best light with photographers like Tom Blagden or Demi and Will McIntyre, and nighttime raku firings with James Watkins. There was even a taxidermy session to explore bird anatomy, taught by Chris Marsh, Director of the Trust, done in connection with a sculpting workshop where birds are a primary subject. Or, in a true use of the island for inspiration and materials, there was ceramics teacher Michael Wisner, who had students go out to the bluffs, dig up clay and make pots using Spanish Moss as the decoration for texture. All this creation of the mind created by nature.

In appreciation, the artists who come as visiting artists contribute a lasting gift to the Trust Art Collection. Today the collection of more than 165 pieces of art reflects the essence of the island and artworks are displayed throughout the buildings.

WEST FRASER PALMETTO POINT



The first artist to visit Spring Island was West Fraser. Fraser was born in Savannah and grew up in the Low Country. He is a nationally recognized plein air landscape painter who has been coming to Spring Island for almost 30 years to paint. Betsy Chaffin originally invited him to come and explore and capture a sense of place about the island. He has been followed throughout the years by other notable artists such as Linda Fantuzzo, Brian Rutenberg, Joellyn Duesberry, Lois Dodd, Michael Karas, Janet Fish, Mary Whyte, Charles Reid and Aldwyth.

Artist, Doug Casebeer, at Anderson Ranch Arts Center, came just after the bridge to the island was completed and spent his retreat drawing and collecting natural artifacts. He credits his visit with allowing him to expand his work in a non-functional, sculptural direction. Carol and Elaine Anthony, twin sisters from Arizona and Connecticut, described Spring Island as a place "where hope becomes nourishment and dream becomes promise. ... a slice of Time has been reborn and a sense of magic rekindled." South Carolina native, New York-based artist Brian Rutenberg felt that the observation-based drawings he completed during his residency inspired his paintings for years to come.

An outcome of the 20+ year Artist program is the growth of focus groups in specific art forms such as ceramics, painting and photography. These groups meet to discuss topics of interest, share ideas, show



LINDA FANTUZZO

their work and learn from each other. Perhaps the best demonstration of how the arts program has shaped the community is the biannual members' art show called the Showcase of Spring Island Artists. This event creates an opportunity for the many talented members to exhibit their creative efforts and let others on the Island enjoy them. During the Showcase, the creative life that has grown on the Island is reflected by the members who show their work. When looking at this work, one thing is obvious: art is a wonderful way to connect people to the community and to the beautiful natural surrounds. It is one more avenue to allow nature to help improve the quality of life for all those who take time to appreciate.