

# Bringing the Gallery Home

Can't make it to the weekend art show? No time for browsing galleries? The Iowa Arts Council allows buyers to browse from home, offering collectors instant access to the state's artists who fly just under the radar.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

*Fallen*, Marcia Joffe-Buska

When mixed-media artist Marcia Joffe-Bouska was building her business two years ago, she had more sculptures and artist's tools than marketing strategies and tactics. So when the Iowa Arts Council launched its Web gallery — BuyIowaArt.com — to help Iowa artists market and promote their work, she took her work online.

The website includes the works of hundreds of Iowa artists and features a broad spectrum of media — oil on canvas, photography, sculpture, music, poetry and more. With a finger on the pulse of what Iowa artists are doing and saying, the Iowa Arts Council, a division of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, responded to a resounding problem among local artisans.

"Many said they don't have a lot of opportunities to sell their work and don't have a Web presence," says Sarah Ekstrand, arts programmer for the Iowa Arts Council, and adds that the site provides convenient search tools to find art by medium and by artist. "The goal is to bring greater exposure to all artists. Some are represented by

galleries; others are not. We give them all a place to sell their work."

Decorah musical group Footnotes uses the website as its only retail outlet for the recent Norwegian-American-style release *Decorah Waltz*. CD sales are soaring to unbelievable levels, says Ekstrand

Whether they are represented by galleries, agents, or fly solo, the site is flexible enough to give the artists authority and control of the work they display. Images, reviews, descriptions, and pricing can be managed from the artist's own computer. "It's a very efficient site and that's the beauty of it. I was a neophyte when I started using it. Now I can add and update easily. I don't even have to handle the actual sale," says Joffe-Bouska, who is merely required to ship the purchased piece within 24 hours.

Artists must submit an application to be featured on the website and are peer-reviewed for the quality of their work. While they do not pay a participation fee, a small percentage of each sale helps the Iowa Arts Council maintain the site. Artists are issued sales checks quar-



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*Cultigen*,  
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terly. Council Bluffs-based Joffe-Bouska has now launched her own website but links her customers to the BuyIowaArt.com site to complete a sale. "There are people across the nation visiting the site and purchasing our pieces," she says.

One of the only states providing such a service to its local artists, Iowa draws national attention and connects Iowa art with collectors from Delaware to California. Ekstrand says BuyIowaArt.com receives some interesting requests. In the first year the site went live, she received a phone call from a shopper searching for a specific boot scraper crafted by an Amana-based artist. And she needed rush delivery.

"I coordinated the purchase and had it shipped to California, but I noticed she was calling from New York. As it turned out, the boot scraper was a set dressing for the television show *Law & Order* and was part of an episode's plot," Ekstrand says with a laugh. "If we hadn't found it, I wonder if the case would have ever been solved."

Those out-of-state purchases represent the largest portion of BuyIowaArt.com sales. "The interest from other states is remarkable," says Ekstrand. It speaks volumes to the quality of Iowa artists."

— Micholyn Fajen is the creative force behind Fajen Consulting, LLC, in West Des Moines.