



FILE/GAVIN MCINTYRE/STAFF

Richard Hagerty's paintings depicting Stations of the Cross hang inside Circular Congregational Church's Lance Hall in Charleston.

# Local art graces Charleston's sacred spaces

SACRED, from F1

history-focused art fostered meaningful exchange.

He invited artist Abba Nizar to create a gallery of works that portray events in Black history through the centuries, events that have not been previously emphasized in teaching on American history. Nizar created the African Redemptive Struggle Museum in a room adjacent to the sanctuary.

"History opens another outreach door. If you don't know how you got where you are, then you can't have much of a vision to where you want to go," Edmondson told The Post and Courier in October.

Circular Congregational Church has looked to many forms of art. In 2020, the church presented an exhibition of works by local artist Richard "Duke" Hagerty featuring the Stations of the Cross, fantastical works that merged the artist's religious upbringing with his ongoing interest in philosophy.

The church that year also commissioned a poem from Marjory Wentworth, former poet laureate of South Carolina, in response to the loss of lives from COVID-19. Titled "One Hundred Thousand Names," it was displayed on a large-scale banner that was placed on the fence facing the sidewalk, offering passersby a moment of reflection.

It also offers a regular Jazz Vespers concert, which explores faith through that musical genre.

St. Andrew's Church in Mount Pleasant has also integrated the arts, dedicating a gallery to them.

"We believe that creativity should be overflowing in our worship of the Creator, and worship that honors and glorifies Him should be at the heart of the arts," it states on its website. "We want to use everything in our means, therefore, to worship our amazing God who has blessed us."

## Artful sanctuaries

Still, there is more rich territory to mine.

"It's an area that's woefully underserved," said Tyler Rollins, executive director of Foundation for Spirituality and the Arts.

The nonprofit organization, which has its main office in New York City, was established in 2021. It hosts residencies in Charleston to nurture connections between religious faith and contemporary art.

Rollins formerly owned a public gallery space in the Chelsea arts district of New York City. He set up the foundation with the aim of fostering meaningful connections between the contemporary

arts and the realm of spirituality and faith, particularly in the South.

"In New York, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine has been a leader in contemporary arts programming, even having a clergy position of Canon for Liturgy and the Arts," Rollins said.

The foundation is now establishing partnerships with local arts and faith-based organizations, with a focus on reaching new audiences and connecting different communities.

The organization held its inaugural event at the College of Charleston in November, hosting visual artist Amina Ahmed, who gave a performative talk about her work, which is deeply infused with her Sufi faith.

While it may have room for continued effort, the marriage of art and spirituality is by no means new to Charleston. Rollins points to the "Thresholds" exhibitions, curated by Eleanor Heartney in 2004, as an example of a local initiative that brought contemporary art to a variety of venues across the city, including religious sanctuaries.

"Eleanor has done groundbreaking work about the influence of religion on contemporary art," he said.

Rollins cites an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum about Catholic themes in Andy Warhol's work as a recent example of the way the two spheres have crossed, as well as recent concerts at the Cathedral of St. Luke and St. Paul.

In the fall, Taylor Music Group launched a new initiative, "Pathways to Healing," with a concept concert featuring musical repertoire focused on healing of all kinds. The programming included a discussion with physicians, clergy and artists to consider the role of music in healing the body, mind and spirit.

In May, the Foundation for Spirituality and the Arts will host its first artist in residence, Arahmaiani, one of the leading performance artists of Southeast Asia.

"Her practice centers around building bridges between different communities and connecting art, spirituality and ecology," Rollins said. "Her work has not just been seen in art institutions but also in sites as varied as a nature preserve in Java, a church in Germany and a monastery in Tibet.

The focal point of Arahmaiani's residency will be a public performance on the afternoon of May 15 in downtown Charleston as part of the annual Spirited Brunch event. She will present her "Flag Project," which has been performed in many countries around the world and involves bringing together a diverse



FILE/GRACE BEAHM ALFORD/STAFF

South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson speaks to the crowd gathered during a Stand with Israel event at Synagogue Emanu-El in West Ashley, which features a sculpture of a Menorah in its sanctuary.

group of people in public spaces to carry flags emblazoned with certain meaningful keywords.

"The project is designed to bridge divides between communities and to foster a spirit of mutual understanding. For Charleston, the performance will focus on inter-faith harmony, a joyous celebration of diversity and connecting various sites around the historic downtown," Rollins said.

He added that participants, some carrying flags and others walking along, will march to various sites in downtown Charleston over the course of about an hour, stopping at various locations to wave the flags, converse or sing.

"I can't wait to see how people in Charleston will respond to this very moving performance," he said.

And the Holy City is attracting artists to cover its faith practices, too. Photographer Greg Miller has chronicled hundreds of worshippers on Ash Wednesday for 25 years. His book "Unto Dust" (L'Artiere) features many of those images. Miller came to Charleston this year to do the same.

"I am fascinated with the outward display of faith against the modern-day world," he said.

In Charleston, as he no doubt discovered, that outward display of faith is easy to spot, and frequently artful.

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GREG MILLER/PROVIDED

Photographer Greg Miller came to Charleston on Ash Wednesday to capture worshippers displaying the iconic cross on their forehead.