

Thompson Valley Art League Organizing Fundraiser, Art Sale

BY CARINA JULIG REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Jill Atchison took over as director of the Thompson Valley Art League a year ago after she and her husband relocated to Loveland.

An artist and longtime art lover, Atchison was excited to move to a town with such a vibrant arts community and to work at the league, which runs Lincoln Gallery, the city's only nonprofit art gallery. She expected to retire here and enjoy a quieter pace of life after her previous corporate job in Denver.

What she wasn't expecting was that she would be racing to save the gallery after it was put in challenging financial straits by a global pandemic.

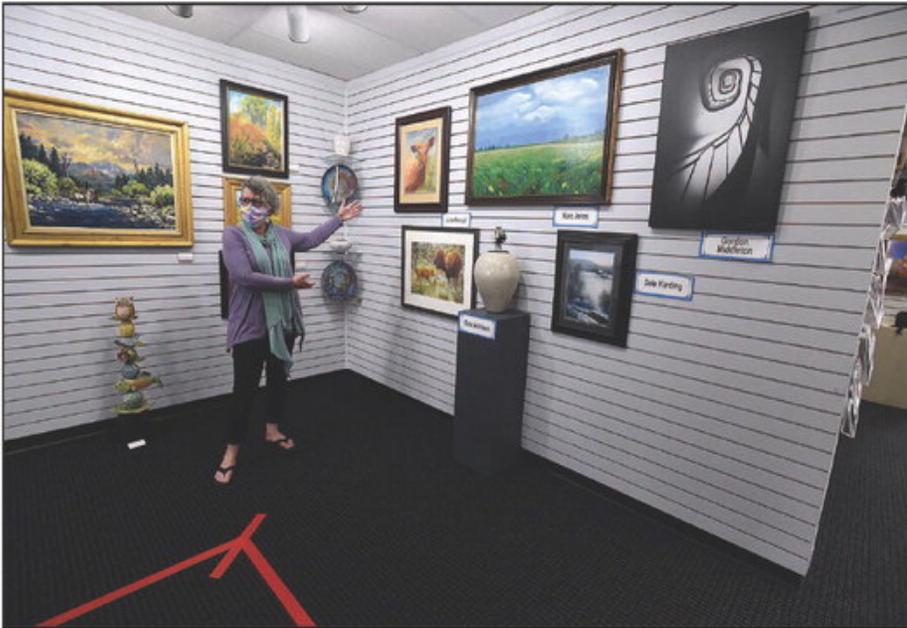
The Thompson Valley Art League is a collective of local artists, and puts on the National Fine Art Show in May and the Art in the Park festival in the summer. As part of membership in the league artists get to display their art in the gallery at 429 N. Lincoln Ave.

This year the gallery was shut for about six weeks due to the coronavirus, and all of its art classes had to be canceled. The National Fine Art Show was postponed and Atchison said she is still waiting to hear whether the city will allow Art in the Park, currently scheduled for Aug. 8-9, to go forward. The festival generates almost all of the gallery's revenue.

As a nonprofit, the gallery operates on a shoestring budget, Atchison said, and the cumulative closures and cancellations are putting it in hot water. To try to ensure that it will have a financial cushion, Atchison started a GoFundMe for the gallery that has raised almost \$3,000 out of its \$10,000 goal so far.

The gallery is also doing a series of weekly sales of art donated to the gallery from members of the Art League. To raise money for the gallery, Atchison will sell the pieces first-come-first-served for half-price in an auction streamed on Facebook Live each Friday. The first sale will be on Friday, May 8, with paintings, photography and sculpture from six local artists up for grabs.

If the fundraisers work, the gallery will only make a minor loss this year and should be able to stay open, Atchison said, but that depends on how much people in the community are able to contribute. With the pandemic's economic impacts looming large, she knows that for many art will be a luxury. "People don't buy art when they're trying to put food on the table," she said.



Jill Atchison, director of the Lincoln Gallery, on Friday shows off some of artwork that was donated to the gallery to sell at a discount online to raise money for the gallery, which is struggling after being closed during the coronavirus.

The gallery reopened on Friday, May 1, with social distancing measures and the requirement that customers wear masks. The reopening brought a promising sign: Almost as soon as the doors were unlocked, a man walked in and bought two paintings.

"That never happens," Atchison said excitedly. Local artists say that the gallery closing would be a blow to Loveland's art scene.

"I really treasure the relationship I have with the gallery and the Art League," said photographer Gordon Middleton, who has been a member of the League for about a decade.

The gallery is a valuable community service, he said, and he hopes that people will support it during this time.

The Lincoln Gallery is special because it doesn't judge which artists can display art based off career success or their status in the arts world, said painter Marc Jones. "As long as you're passionate and you're willing to do the work, that's what they're looking for," he said.

The future of Loveland's arts scene is unclear, but Atchison said the Arts League will continue to think of new ways to try to support the gallery if its normal activities remain curtailed by the pandemic. "We're going to try everything we can," she said.

For information about the virtual art sale on May 8 at 6 p.m. or to access the GoFundMe, go to lincolngallery.com