

COAST TOURISTS PASS ON HIGH-PRICED ART

THE COAST Plein air seascapes, colorful blown glass and alluring sculptures beckon to Cannon Beach tourists, but art galleries up and down the Coast are struggling. Higher-priced items are generally not selling as well as in the past, while lower-priced pieces continue to sell — and in the world of art, prices cannot simply be slashed.

“To devalue artwork by offering it at sale

price is not fair to the artist or previous collectors who have bought pieces,” says Jeanine Grafton, owner of RiverSea Gallery in Astoria. Like many gallery owners she’s asked artists to bring in smaller or lower-priced pieces along with their regular work.

Grafton has been in the business for more than 30 years and this is the worst slowdown she’s seen. According to Catherine Rick-

bone, executive director of the nonprofit Oregon Coast Council for the Arts, approximately six of the estimated 125 coastal galleries have closed this year. Sales are flat at the council’s two galleries in Newport.

“We’re doing fine but we’re not growing like we used to,” says Jeffrey Hull, artist and co-owner of The Jeffrey Hull Gallery in Cannon Beach. “It sounds morbid, but you just have to survive; you don’t want to be a casualty.” They’ve seen a drop in business since 2007 but are still making a profit.

Art galleries are an important aspect of Cannon Beach’s economy.

“We are known as an art destination,” says Patty Coomes, co-owner of Haystack Gallery. “It does help to have a very nice beach and a rock for inspiration.”

She estimates their revenue is flat or down this year.

One gallery that has actually profited from the recession is Newport-based CNC Gallery, run by the nonprofit Yaquina Art Association. Most of CNC’s pieces are under \$100. Attendance has improved this year and sales were up in June.

Galleries have banded together and gotten creative to attract more customers. Cannon Beach’s 13 galleries have started promoting townwide themes to attract tourists. The Sage Gallery in Bandon is offering art classes and the RiverSea Gallery has created a new series called Artists on Sunday, where people can meet the artist and see a demonstration.

Gallery owners know they’d find more success in a city than on the Coast. But they’ve chosen to sell art in towns such as Cannon Beach and Newport, surrounded by the natural beauty that inspires art.

JENNY FURNISS

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\$38,467: the **AVERAGE INCOME** of a resident in one of Oregon’s **METRO** areas in 2007.

\$29,626: the **AVERAGE INCOME** of a **NON-METRO** resident in Oregon in 2007.