

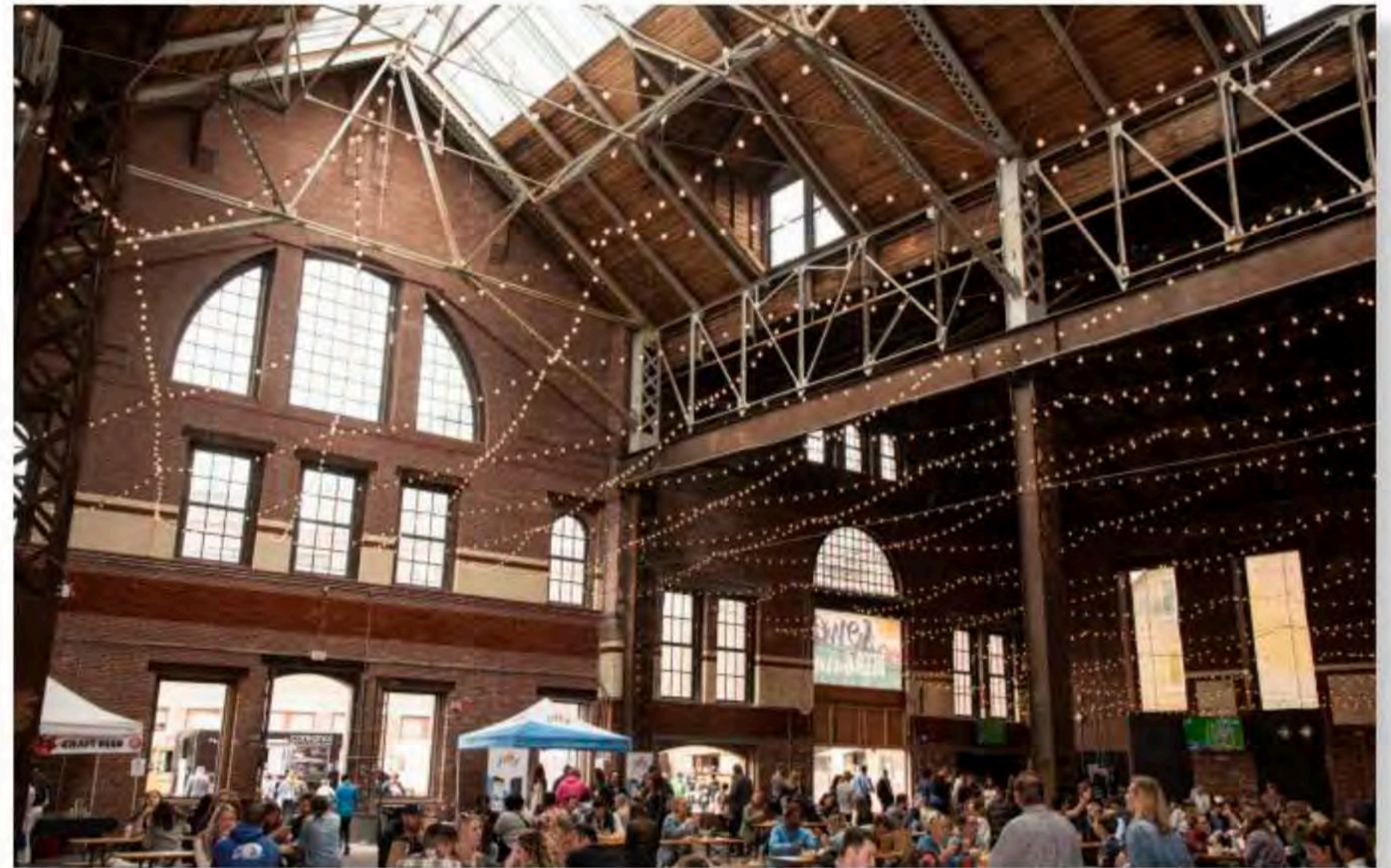
SOWA Sparkles with Open Studios Approaching

By Richard Campbell

This past weekend was the pre-kick off of the Open Studios at SOWA, in preparation for the full-fledged Open Studios Sept. 15th- 16th. For anyone who hasn't attended SOWA recently, it is certainly coming alive as a casual weekend go to place, loaded with premier arts, shopping and entertainment options. The upcoming Open Studios is a once a year event in which all the artist's studios are open to the public. Perhaps the largest open studios in Boston, the SOWA experience emanates from the SOWA Artists Guild, that was nationally recognized in 2015 as the "second best arts district" in the country. For South Bostonians, it is an easy walk. Just over the South Boston Broadway bridge, hang a sharp left onto Harrison Street and walk three blocks (450 Harrison) into the South End to begin discovering this area of the city.

The fun part for visitors is not only the 100 artist open studios, and over 30 art galleries, but all the boutique shops, food trucks, vendors, and entertainments. Some folks simply head to the Beer Barn to watch a Pats game inside the cool rehabilitated power station. There are some funky used clothing shops like *Bobby from Boston*, which has a lot of junky stuff, the kind of things you might want for Halloween, but also vintage wears you can't find in regular retail. Big name design shops, like Casa Design don't seem to bother with the weekend traffic, but women were crowded into *Sara Campbell's* shop that bridges interior design and fashion.

The SOWA Farmers' Market is pricy, but the food is of the highest quality- organic and farm fresh. The specialty booths go from the mundane to the arcane in the market like: *I See Spain*, which is a vendor for pretty Spanish pottery, including their trademark garlic crusher plate that has a reservoir for making dressings, *2 Dog Treats*, that make gour-



met dog treats, *Bauman's Botanicals* who make super-food biome botanicals, and wins the award for funniest promotion. There were some new start-ups like Pricklee.com which makes various juices from prickly pears, that presumably provide magical super fruit natural hydration and have a very friendly staff. Lots of people sported their pooches around the yards, and families with small children love this environment for its cozy safe feeling. The food trucks offer everything from Bon Mei to Stuffed Sopapillas, to Trolley Dogs, aided by expensive ice creams and more expensive beer. In short, you're in a really nice little village surrounded by chic restaurants and bars. For those with cash to splurge, the sky's the limit at South End eateries.

I settled on eating directly from the Farmer's Market- (a nice spicy chicken sandwich) and when I sat down at the checkered table cloth eating area I ran into a few South Bostonians: Suzie Flaherty and Joanne Burzyk. We talked Polish food shops in South Boston, L Street running, and the Harbor Walk- Nice Ladies! In the Beer Barn while the Patriots were playing on the big screen Hank Wonder, was with his small group casually performing. Part country, a mix of soul and a little bit of local

down-home folk, this tight band has an admiring group of fans from its shows at Club Passim for good reason. Their voices blended smooth and they executed original songs mixed with some standards. The Beer Barn has such high ceilings, and is casually decorated with twinkling lights, that bring it a certain elegance not normally found in mass chow down spaces. Of course, the reason to go to SOWA is to see the art, and as this was the preview of coming attractions, I managed to see a few galleries.

The artists here are so willing to spend time to show you their works without that cloying sense of "will you buy something". I went into the small basement Beacon Gallery first to see a shared show between Raquel Fornasaro and Wendy Shapiro called *Be Here Now*. Christine O'Donnell, the director of the gallery went through the show with me, detailing how the works were done, and information on the artists. They are two seemingly very different artists who collaborated to create something pretty unique. There is a piece on Le Petit Prince by Fornasaro that I am certain will end up being perfect for some lucky kid's bedroom, that had as much charm as her quirky animal pictures. Shapiro's works were more abstract and included some tex-

tures that made them stand out from being merely minimalist works. Their collaborative works would be great to bring some texture to the new Seaport buildings.

Debbly Krim who bills herself as a creator of Photography & Fine Arts has a massive two-sided gallery that reveals an artist comfortable in multiple mediums with the ability to create everything from pop art iconic looks, to serious oil portraits, pristine landscapes, jewelry and fine still life photography. Her work makes a statement without being pretentious, and yet provides enough mystery or humor wrapped in high production values. Elizabeth Strasser was minding the venerable *Bromfield Gallery* where some of her works were on display, along with many others. Her show, *Porcelain Muse* is coming up in October with an opening reception October 5th. As fired pottery that meets abstract sculpture her works stand out as pieces in which she stretches the limits and harken to a Miro-like world.

There are so many other galleries and artists, that I could go on for pages, but if you are looking for something great to do in the coming weekend, this fall is the perfect time to check out SOWA!



Carrie Joy & Duncan Donnelly of *I See Spain*.



Debby Krim multi-talented artist poses in front of her Toy Series.



Christine O'Donnell, Gallery Director of *Beacon Gallery*.



South Bostonians: Suzie Flaherty and Joanne Burzyk hanging out!



Hank Wonder sings his blues and folk selections.



Elizabeth Strasser was minding the venerable *Bromfield Gallery*.