

Art dealer Callen McJunkin admits to being an addict. "I think all art dealers are addicts," she said. "We can't resist buying pieces. If there's wall space at home, it's covered in art work." McJunkin graduated from Hollins College with a degree in art history and says she wanted to be a painter, but didn't quite have the talent to pull it off. So her love of art manifested itself in the business of representing new, exciting artists and seasoned professionals. Since 1983, she has helped individuals and businesses acquire fine art. She has represented both West Virginia and regional artists. McJunkin said she believes that art should affect the buyer and also do so enduringly. After a couple of years away from the downtown art scene, she has reopened Callen McJunkin Gallery in The Loft at 419 Hale St., above Stray Dogs Antiques. The grand opening will coincide with today's downtown ArtWalk from 5 to 8 p.m. "Our last space was with Steve Payne on Capitol Street," she said. "It was perfect - right beside a parking lot and next door to Ellen's Ice Cream." But when Payne decided to go back to running his business from his home and close his part of the gallery, McJunkin decided to take her business home, too. That was in 2006, and it's taken her a couple of years to find the right space to open a gallery again. She had an opportunity to move into office space downtown but decided it wasn't conducive to exhibitions. The fun part of the business is meeting with artists and clients, she said. When the loft space above the antique shop opened up, McJunkin said it was perfect. "We secured the space, then went to work," she said. "The interior has exposed brick walls on two sides that was spattered with concrete. It took us a while to work the concrete out of the bricks and then to put up the wallboard to hang the art." With high ceilings, a concrete floor and suspended track lighting, it has the feel of an urban art gallery in a big city. "There's good energy in this space," McJunkin said. With the new gallery, she has about 2,000 square feet to display both large and small pieces, sculpture and even furniture by Jim Probst. In addition to the side walls, there are four movable display panels that hold art. These, she said, will come in handy if she wants to close off a part of the gallery or rearrange art pieces. Gallery artists featured through April 30 include Robin McClintock, John Borden Evans, Charles Jupiter Hamilton, Ann Lyne, Anne Shreve and Tom Brady. McJunkin has planned gallery exhibits through the spring and summer that include a solo show, "New Paintings," from Elizabeth Geiger, of Charlottesville, Va., that will open May 10 and "Art on Paper," featuring works from Barrie Kaufman, Steve Bickley, Sonya Evanisko, Juan Giraldo and others, July 20-July 31. The gallery will be open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and anytime by appointment. With each gallery exhibition, McJunkin has planned a reception for the artist and some will coordinate with the monthly ArtWalks or other downtown planned activities. "With this space, I can have exhibitions of a few large art pieces or cover the walls with small artwork," she said. "Depending on the artist, I'll be able to show as much or a little, especially with very large pieces, as needed." McJunkin is at a point in her career where she's more interested in the art on the walls than the bottom line of the business. "I've got a lot more patience now, and I'm doing what I want to do," she explained. "I'm a lot more interested in the relationships I have with my clients and the artists I represent. That's very important. Profit is not as important as it once was." She enjoys working with artists, talking to them about their work and their ambitions. Art pieces in her gallery today include work from 20-somethings to paintings from a couple of 80-year-olds. "Of course I put up the art that I love," McJunkin said. "I have to be emotionally and intellectually interested in it or I wouldn't hang it. I could buy something of everyone we represent and sometimes have." Finding the art to exhibit comes by way of suggestions from other artists, loyal clients and shows and exhibits she's visited. She travels to New York to art shows and will join the Clay Center Collector's Club for a trip to Chicago for the huge international Art Chicago Fair next week. "The market for fine art is small in Charleston, but we have some terrific galleries here that showcase some talented artists," she said. "I want to see more people live with art, to know more about art. If you visit a gallery and don't understand a piece, ask and it will be explained. It's the way to learn and hopefully get more art in your life. "I'd rather have art around me than anything," she said. "That piece hanging over the couch is much more important to me than the couch."