

A MAGICAL JOURNEY THROUGH VAN GOGH'S MASTERPIECES

by MARK WALLACE

Imagine an art exhibit like no other, where classic paintings surround you like larger-than-life murals. Where thoughts and emotions are not the only things stirring – but the paintings are animated to highlight brushstrokes, detail and color, as if to take you into the mind of the artist himself.

Welcome to the Immersive Van Gogh Exhibit Charlotte, a modern-age art exhibit that brings to life the magnificent works of Vincent Van Gogh in monumental scale. Get immersed in his sunny landscapes, night scenes, portraits and still life paintings that will fill 500,000 cubic feet of space at Camp North End on the outskirts of uptown this summer.



Gabbard

“I was a fan of this creative team and their style after seeing two other shows in Paris,” said Blumenthal Performing Arts President and CEO Tom Gabbard. “When my friend Corey Ross, who is the producer of Immersive Van Gogh, called in July to tell me of their success in Toronto and ask if we’d be interested in creating a version for Charlotte, it was a quick yes.”

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Immersive Van Gogh Exhibit in Toronto.

The installation includes masterpieces like *Mangeurs de Pommes de Terre* (The Potato Eaters, 1885), *Nuit Étoilée* (Starry Night, 1889), *Les Tournesols* (Sunflowers, 1888), and *La Chambre à coucher* (The Bedroom, 1889), and much more.

“This style of immersive art is new to the U.S.,” said Gabbard. “I’ve seen other shows in Europe and Australia and know U.S. audiences will love it once they have a taste.”

Time Out calls it “a visual spectacle ... packed with eye-catching moments.”

The exhibit is a “blockbuster digital experience that has taken the art world by storm,” according to artnet News.

The unique exhibit runs from June 18 to Sept.12, and it has been selling fast right out of the gate.

PERFECT TIMING

With social distancing built into the design, it’s a perfect segue for Blumenthal Performing Arts as it prepares to reopen its theaters in late summer/early fall.

“The opportunity to host Immersive Van Gogh would have been attractive at any time, but right now it’s especially timely,” said Gabbard. “They’ve smartly designed it with circles on the floor to stand in socially distanced groups. Capacity to enter is controlled based on current COVID guidelines.” Other safety measures are in place, as well.

A big step in getting the exhibit here was finding the right location.

“We needed a very special place and



PHOTO CREDIT MICHAEL BROSILOW

The Immersive Van Gogh Exhibit in Chicago.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

looked all over Charlotte,” Gabbard said. “The exhibit needs a massive amount of space. It also needed to be a destination with restaurants, bars and other amenities to enjoy as part of the visit.

Camp North End fit the bill perfectly.

“Camp North End has a rich history, but for many coming to Immersive Van Gogh, it will be their first time there,” said Gabbard. “The visit will have a great sense of discovery as people experience art that surrounds and envelopes them, in a location that creatively inspires.”

SETTING UP THE EXPERIENCE

Lighthouse Immersive, the originators of the Atelier des Lumieres exhibition in Paris that has been seen by more than 2 million visitors worldwide, is bringing the Van Gogh exhibit to Charlotte. The exhibit is designed by creative director and Italian film producer Massimiliano Siccardi with original music by multimedia composer Luca Longobardi, who is renowned for bringing together classical and contemporary genres. Together, they create an all-encompassing experience of art, light, sound, movement and imagination.

“Immersive Van Gogh is astonishing in scale, breathtakingly stunning, and induces a completely novel experience to the iconic works of van Gogh,” says co-producer Corey Ross, Lighthouse Immersive.

The setup is a massive undertaking in itself as the projected artwork is custom mapped to each location. Planning the transformation of the space in the historic Ford building at Camp North End for the exhibit began in January, and onsite prep work began in early March so that the exhibit would be ready to open my mid-June.

“There is so much coordination that has to happen between the creative team, the team ... who is handling all of the technical elements, the architects and the contractors,” said Meredith Pompeani Miller, special events production manager at Blumenthal. “Given that we are transforming a completely empty space, with no surface to project on as it stands, we have had to work closely with the architects and contractors, while also coordinating with the production



Miller



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAMP NORTH END

With restaurants, bars and more, Camp North End makes a perfect destination spot for the Immersive Van Gogh Exhibit.

team to ensure everything that is necessary to make the exhibit function can fit and work in the space as it is created.”

She said careful planning is needed because if anything has to be changed after the fact, it's a huge amount of work.

A BOON TO THE ECONOMY

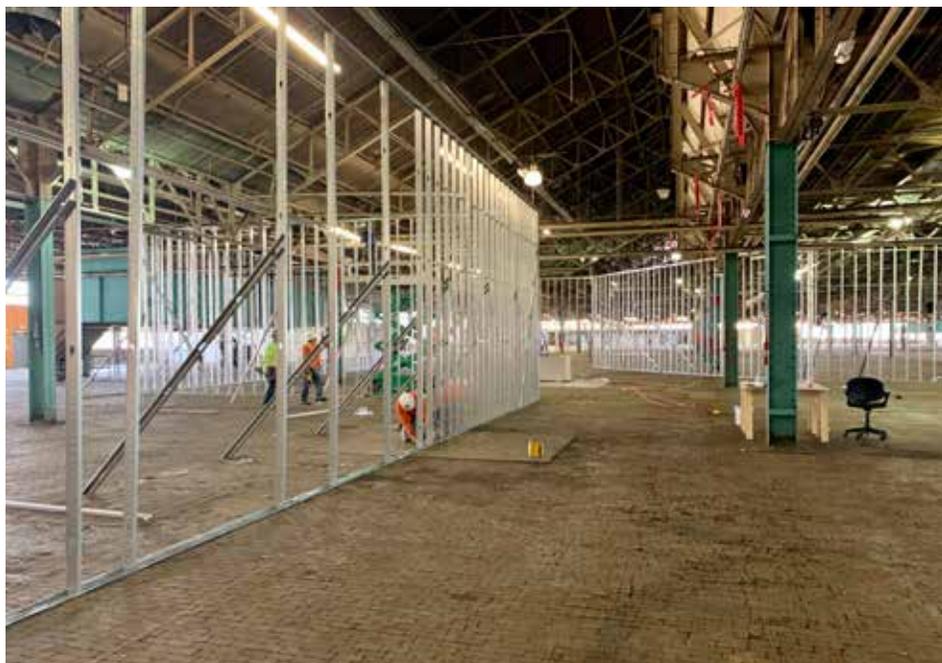
All of this effort is good for the economy and fits in with Blumenthal's focus to help restart our city and region.

“Getting people back to work is part of that,” said Gabbard. “Immersive Van Gogh not only will be a direct job creator but will also be a huge boost to restaurants, hotels and workers there who have been without employment.”

With many time slots and some whole days already selling out, it's clearly the kind of thing folks in the region have been needing to satisfy their creative culture cravings.

“We're thrilled by the response and hope that a success will lead to others like it,” Gabbard said. ✨

SENSORY WARNING: This exhibition contains sequences of bright flashing lights which may affect visitors who are susceptible to photosensitive epilepsy as well as others who are sensitive to moving lights. Viewer discretion is advised.



The historic Ford building at Camp North End is prepped for setting up the Immersive Van Gogh Exhibit.

MORE GIANT BUNNIES AND ARTISTS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE AND THE CORNER WILL HAVE THE CITY HOPPING

Charlotte SHOUT! Festival Relaunches In September

by BRANDON CARTER and JOY WEST

On a sunny Saturday afternoon in uptown Charlotte, the aroma of tacos, lobster rolls and hickory smoked barbecue from food trucks tantalize the senses as bass-pumping music from a nearby stage has an exuberant crowd dancing and cheering. Up ahead, bright colors of fluorescent spray paint catch the eye as a graffiti artist creates a one-of-a-kind mural. To the left, a group of children lose themselves in a sea of bubbles, and on the right is a lush green park filled with giant, glowing bunnies that invite selfies from smiling admirers.

Welcome to Charlotte SHOUT! – a weeks-long festival highlighting the convergence of community and art and celebrating Charlotte’s creativity, diversity and resilience. Presented by Charlotte Center City Partners and Blumenthal Performing Arts Sept. 17-Oct. 3, the festival will weave together the talents of internationally acclaimed and locally grown artists, dancers, musicians, poets, storytellers, photographers, chefs and thought leaders. And yes, the bunnies will be back!

The festival had been a beloved staple of Charlotte’s vibrant arts and culture scene until it went on hiatus in 2009. CCCP and Blumenthal joined forces 10 years later to reinstate the festival as part of the city’s 250th birthday celebration. The festival’s



PHOTOS ON THIS PAGE BY ALEXANDER SOUTH NC

The giant bunnies of “Intrude” attract a crowd at the 2019 Charlotte SHOUT!

revival was a success with more than 200 events over two weeks in late April and early May of 2019. Plans were made to present the festival in early 2020 but the pandemic forced a postponement.

After a period filled with immense challenges and social separation, SHOUT! 2021 aims to bring the community together and provide a time for audiences and participants to reflect on the beauty of our planet, our community and each unique person that makes it so special.

Blumenthal President Tom Gabbard says, “Our goal is to make Charlotte SHOUT! the most inspiring annual festival in the Southeast celebrating art, music, food and ideas. This year we will especially

savor the chance to safely be together again to enjoy our vibrant city and the creativity that helps to define it.”

Through myriad events presented in four overarching themes – art, music, food and ideas – the festival will connect with the community and spotlight homegrown talent in an even more profound way this year.

'MADE IN CLT'

From dancers to magicians, singers to visual artists, festival planners are looking for creatives from Charlotte and the surrounding area to take center stage at SHOUT! 2021. An all-new program called “Made in CLT” will cultivate performances and activations by artists who are local to the Charlotte region. Artists from all disciplines are encouraged to submit their work in application for a spot in the 2021 festival.

“In addition to talent from around the world, we’re actively searching for local artists from all areas of Charlotte’s vibrant creative community to participate in this year’s festival,” said Robert Krumbine, chief creative officer at Center City Partners. “Whether you’re a local musician, a playwright, an acrobat, a master chef or a graffiti artist, there could be a spot for you in our lineup.”

Artist submissions are being accepted



Spectators of all ages join in the fun at First Ward Park during Charlotte SHOUT! 2019.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



"Of Earth and Sky" by artist Luke Jerram was first presented in Gloucester, England, in 2020.

PHOTO BY JON CRAIG

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

through May 15 at CharlotteShout.com.

'OF EARTH AND SKY'

Local wordsmiths will be highlighted in "Of Earth and Sky," a large-scale poetry installation by artist Luke Jerram that was first presented across Gloucester, England, in 2020.

Experienced and amateur poets are encouraged to submit poems that will be used to create public art pieces throughout the city during SHOUT! Throughout April and May, poets can attend weekly workshops, either in person or virtually, hosted by award-winning poet and Blumenthal Director of Creative Engagement Boris "Bluz" Rogers. The free workshops allow poets to learn more about the "Of Earth and Sky" vision and receive writing prompts to guide their work.

"The goal for the 'Of Earth and Sky' project is to poetically amplify the voices of Charlotte residents, with the workshops functioning as a way to help (them) edit and fine tune their work before submitting," said Rogers. "The curation

team will simply be looking for honesty and creativity, so whether you have been writing for 40 years or four minutes, we will be accepting submissions from everyone with a poem in their heart."

Winning poets will be selected and announced in early June. For information, visit BlumenthalArts.org/OfEarthandSky.

HOPPING BACK TO TOWN

A fan favorite in 2019, Parer Studio's "Intrude" will make a triumphant return to SHOUT! in 2021. This large-scale public art installation by artist Amanda Parer that features illuminated bunnies drew thousands of spectators of all ages to uptown Charlotte during the 2019 festival. This year, festival organizers promise the giant glowing bunnies will be even bigger and better as they "intrude" upon an uptown hotspot, which will be announced at a later date.

The full lineup of musical acts, art installations, performances and conversations will be announced this summer. To sign up for updates and learn more about Charlotte SHOUT!, visit CharlotteShout.com. ✨

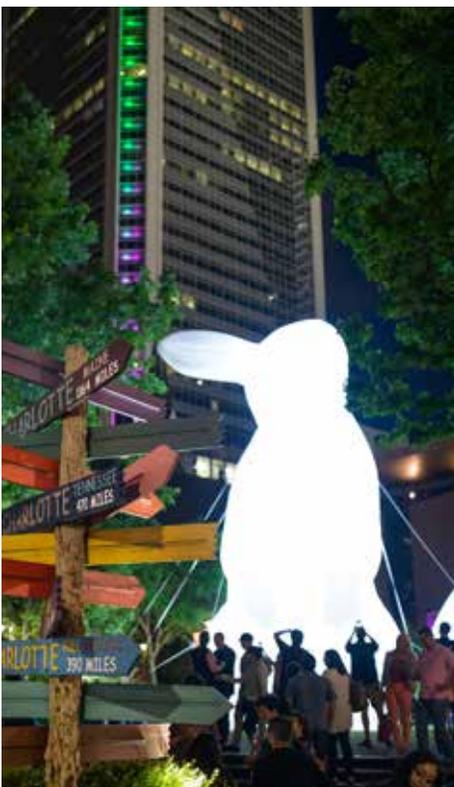


PHOTO BY ALEXANDER SOUTH NC

A 2019 fan favorite at The Green uptown, "Intrude" by Parer Studio features inflatable and very photogenic bunnies.

DIFFERENCE MAKERS

George and Eva Raftelis

Arts Advocates Passionate About Helping Communities

by LIZ ROTHHAUS BERTRAND

Conversation flows easily with George and Eva Raftelis. Friendly and enthusiastic, they are also grateful: for family; for the business George built from the ground up; for opportunities they have had to travel and meet people from around the world; and the chance to learn from every new experience. They are also deeply committed to supporting the community, in Charlotte and beyond.

Take, for instance, one of their passion projects, helping a church and school near Nairobi, Kenya, where the well went dry about six years ago.

In order to have clean drinking water, members of the community had been hauling water from a great distance. Through Davidson College Presbyterian Church, where the Raftelises are longtime members, they became personally involved in providing funds as well as expertise.

George Raftelis, founder and chair emeritus of Raftelis, a leading provider of consulting services to the utility industry and public sector, has spent his career advising municipalities and states across the U.S. on how to best finance and manage water and wastewater projects. He put those skills to work in Africa too, helping this impoverished community determine the best way – with the limited technology



Eva and George Raftelis stop for a photo while cycling in the Algau region in Southern Germany.



The Raftelises have their photo taken during Blumenthal Performing Arts 25th Anniversary “Big Dreams” celebration with Leslie Odom Jr.

available – to dig a well, lay plumbing and select contractors to complete the work.

“I’m very proud to say that as of about three months ago, water is flowing freely there,” George Raftelis said last year. “... We believe water is a right that everyone is entitled to.”

That image of a well flowing to benefit everyone in the community serves as an apt metaphor for the important philanthropic work the Raftelises are doing closer to home, including at Blumenthal Performing Arts, where they have just established a new endowment to expand arts opportunities to those who would not otherwise be able to afford them. From show tickets to arts education, the endowment will help students and others have access to the arts.

“We just hope it will continue to grow and benefit the community,” said George Raftelis, who recently finished a six-year term serving as a Blumenthal trustee.

The Raftelises support many other organizations, too. “The foundation that we set up that feeds these endowments really focuses on four areas,” he said. These include:

1. Educational institutions (like George’s alma maters, Eckerd College and Duke University, and their grandchildren’s school, Charlotte Lab School).
2. Organizations that support

disadvantaged groups (such as Davidson Housing Coalition and E2D, a nonprofit that aims to eliminate the digital divide by providing refurbished computers to needy students).

3. Religious organizations.
4. Community arts organizations (In addition to Blumenthal, they support groups like Davidson Community Players and WDAV, the local classical music station.)

WHY THE ARTS?

Since moving to Charlotte 45 years ago, the Raftelises have become progressively more involved in the arts. “When we (relocated to) Charlotte, we started going to various shows at Blumenthal ... and we really connected with that. We enjoyed the shows. This was decades ago,” said George Raftelis.

Soon they became subscribers and eventually joined the Producer’s Circle, Blumenthal’s membership program for the organization’s most generous donors. While supporting Blumenthal’s key outreach programs like Arts For All, they started meeting others with a passion for the arts and enjoying new experiences tied to performances here and elsewhere.

Among them has been the exciting opportunity to meet performers at opening night festivities.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

“I love those cast parties,” said Eva Raftelis. “All of them are different. We (have gone) to a few of them here and there. It’s so interesting to see the performers and see the ‘real them,’ not the ‘stage them.’”

Over the years, their adventures with Team Blumenthal have also included traveling with small groups led by Blumenthal’s CEO Tom Gabbard and his wife, Vickie, to other places offering unique performing arts experiences, such as the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston and the massive Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the world’s largest arts festival in Scotland. It was in Scotland that they had the chance to see an early version of the current hit show, *SIX*.

The Raftelises have also enjoyed guided trips to New York where they’ve previewed phenomenal new shows before they arrived in Charlotte. “We got to go behind the scenes there and meet some of the producers,” said George Raftelis. “Our performing arts IQ went up a lot.”

DISCOVERING THE WORLD THROUGH THE ARTS

This has been new territory for both of the Raftelises, who had little exposure to the performing arts as children. George, growing up in a small South Carolina town, spent more time exploring nature and building erector sets than practicing his clarinet, which he studied briefly in middle school. Meanwhile Eva, who spent her childhood on the other side of the world, in

“Art is a universal experience.”

EVA RAFTELIS

ART ADVOCATE | BLUMENTHAL SUPPORTER

Augsburg, Germany, had an early passion for languages (in addition to German and English, she speaks French and Italian) but virtually no contact with the arts.

“In our adult age, we found out that exposure to the arts changes your mind or your opinion or your view of the world,” said Eva Raftelis.

That’s similar to how she views travel, recalling Mark Twain’s famous observation that “travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness.”

In fact, to George, the arts are a type of voyage. He describes them as “a journey to other intellectual places.” An artist’s creation – whether it’s a painting, a musical composition, a dance or some other expression – is a tangible reflection of another person’s ideas, a place we would normally not be able to access.

“It’s astounding to me that the human mind can create this art,” said George Raftelis.

But while the arts demonstrate the unique talents or individuals, they also speak to us across cultures.

“Art is a universal experience,” said Eva Raftelis.

Like travel, the arts expand our understanding of humanity. Whether we watch stories unfold on stage or visit new places, we develop an understanding that deep down, we are all the same. People may dress differently, practice different faiths, eat different foods but they all want what’s best for their children and are eager to learn, explained Eva Raftelis.

This act of discovery through the arts is something the Raftelises want to make sure more people have the opportunity to experience.



The Raftelises have their photo taken in front of Roslyn Chapel outside of Edinburgh during a trip where they met up with Blumenthal President Tom Gabbard and his wife, Vickie, along with other Blumenthal staff.

“I think Blumenthal, and Gabbard in particular, they’ve done an incredible job of expanding the performing arts IQ of the community,” said George Raftelis, noting the top quality shows they bring to Charlotte, and educational programs like The Blumey Awards, which have helped launch the careers of numerous young people in the arts.

Thanks to the generosity of the Raftelises, their new endowment will act as a continuous source, ensuring that even more arts experiences flow and reach the neediest in our community for years to come. ✨