

Sarona artist featured at Spooner Arts In Hand Gallery



Sarona-based artist Roger Nielsen is the featured artist at Arts in Hand Gallery in downtown Spooner during the month of August. - Photo by Harriet Rice

SPOONER – When he was 5 years old, Roger Nielson’s mother told his babysitter, “If he gets bored or gets in your hair, just give him a pencil and paper.” That’s when the Minneapolis-born, now Wisconsin resident says he was inspired to become an artist. His colorful youthful creations were tacked up around the house, and proudly treasured by his grandmother. Today, Nielsen’s art graces the wall of Arts in Hand Gallery in downtown Spooner where his work is featured during the month of August.

Nielsen’s self-described early “refrigerator art” was honed by years of study during the 1950s and 1960s through classes at the Walker Art Center, the Minneapolis College of Arts and Design – formerly the Minneapolis School of Art, and the prestigious School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

For more than 70 years, he’s been a versatile artist working primarily in the tradition of 19th and 20th century oils on canvas, although Nielsen loves all genres and mediums of art. “My dream was to be a wildlife illustrator, live in the woods and paint wildlife as well as other subjects,” said Nielsen.

After a brief stint in the Navy, he set his art aside to raise a family and formed his own art-related business in framing called Master Framers Inc., which became nationally known for his creative frame design.

“There is no doubt that a frame can make or break a work of art,” said Nielsen. “Ask any collector or dealer and they will tell you the frame designed by the artist is the one that will add value.” Nielsen designed a number of the frames for his own paintings now

on display at Arts in Hand Gallery.

Early in his career, Nielsen was part of a group that established one of the most successful art fairs in the Midwest, the Minneapolis Uptown Arts Fair, which is still held annually. As a longtime member of the Professional Picture Framers Association, he helped establish a certification program with uniform standards and procedures for framing.

“It took 60 years, but I finally made it. I live in the woods and paint wildlife,” said Nielsen, referring to his 2015 retirement and permanent move to the Wisconsin North Woods. Drawing on his Danish heritage, he established Valhalla Studios. “I grew up with everything Danish – food, tradition, history,” he said. “Valhalla is actually the ‘heaven’ that Viking warriors strove for so, being a descendant of Vikings, it was only fitting that I call my little piece of heaven on earth Valhalla.”

Nielsen believes art is especially important these days. “I think art can ease the pain and discontent that current affairs bring us. Be it painting, music or theater, we need beauty and positive distractions.” For his current exhibit at the gallery, Nielsen chose works that would appeal to a diverse audience with subjects that could fit into any home or cabin.

Arts in Hand Gallery is located at 210 Walnut St. next to Centennial Park at the corner of Walnut Street and Hwy. 63 in downtown Spooner. The gallery is open Thursday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Visit artsinhand.com and Facebook at [artsinhandgalleryspoonerwi](https://www.facebook.com/artsinhandgalleryspoonerwi) for photos and additional gallery information or call 715-635-9303.