

I appreciate your concerns about our strategic decision to change guidelines for the Whyte Avenue Art Walk for 2010. May I offer an explanation?...

This is not a statement about what is considered Art or what is Craft. It was a very difficult decision – one I have avoided for several years. As owner of The Paint Spot, I accept all definitions of art. We certainly embrace all methods of making art. Craft **IS** Art. The Paint Spot recently expanded. We now stock a wider range of materials for photography, jewelry, casting, textiles, and book arts. Ironically, the same year, we put a limit on the Art Walk Festival. Sigh... it's hard wearing so many hats.

The Whyte Avenue Art Walk has grown beyond our administrative capacity. 350 artists and 20 blocks is big enough. We had two choices; Get focused or find more volunteers and money. As you know, the latter is nearly impossible, so we elected to use a very narrow definition for Art Walk participation. This decision solved many problems for us...

Some Whyte Avenue merchants complained that Art Walk was competing against them.

Rightly so. Many of the stores that provide permission for artists to be outside their doors also carry a number of beautiful, functional works made by local artists.

There are other popular and affordable events that feature artisans and Crafts. Handmade Mafia, Make It Productions, and the Royal Bison Craft Fair are growing in popularity. Every person we turn away is given a handout with contact information for these events. I also see a higher level of art and craft content at Farmer's markets. This is good news.

Can Edmonton have one festival that educates people to buy one of a kind, original artwork?

Most festivals and events treat the visual fine arts like a background. You know how it goes. Let's go out to a visual arts festival buy a card, a necklace, and a coffee and just 'look' at the art. Why spend \$300 on a painting when you can buy a vase for \$30 and necklace for \$10 and say "I went to the Art Walk!"

There was a risk we were going to lose the visual fine artists altogether. In 2009, jewelry, plain pottery, textile art, airbrushing, photography, prints, cards, and street art was more than 75% of the Art Walk. These seemed to be the only things the public were buying. More Art Walk artists started making magnets, posters, t shirts, and other 'trinkets' to sell instead of their art work. The new guidelines encourage the focus to remain on the visual fine arts.

May I get your advice on setting up our guidelines for 2011? How do you define your artists without an exhaustive jury process? The Art Walk is a non-juried event so the rules must be concise, obvious and easy to carry out. Perhaps we're too harsh this year but in the past we've been inconsistent. There is "Craft" and then there is "craft". There are a number of talented Craft Council members who could participate. When does pottery become sculpture? When does form override or equal function?

Please continue promote the Art Walk. Our Edmonton artistic community is too small to be exclusive in our promotional efforts. Artists do not define themselves by only one activity. I turn away musicians and performance artists for the Art Walk but I still post their announcements in my store.

Kim Fjordbotten

Director of the Whyte Avenue Art Walk
Owner of The Paint Spot.