





GOLD COAST STAGE

# Art in the CANYON

*Explore artwork from Laguna Beach and beyond at the town's beloved summer festivals.*

By Ashley Ryan

Each year, the art festivals bring a flurry of excitement to town—for residents and tourists alike. Laguna Canyon transforms into a hotbed of artistic displays, creative events and gourmet cuisine that captivate all who visit, showcasing everything from juried artwork and beloved living pictures to musical performances, fashion shows, interactive workshops and educational opportunities. But the scope of these festivals transcends their grounds, leading to more visitors all over Laguna, at the restaurants, shops, art galleries, beaches and parks that make the region so cherished.

“The summer art festival season is important to Laguna Beach’s identity as Southern California’s premiere art colony,” says Jeff Nadler, business manager for Laguna Art-A-Fair, “as well as the city’s success in attracting visitors who also patronize local businesses.”

New artists are on display every summer and the lineup of festival-related events evolves and expands with each iteration, ensuring that visitors have new things to see and experience. Here, we explore what 2025 has to offer at the dynamic Laguna Canyon festivals.



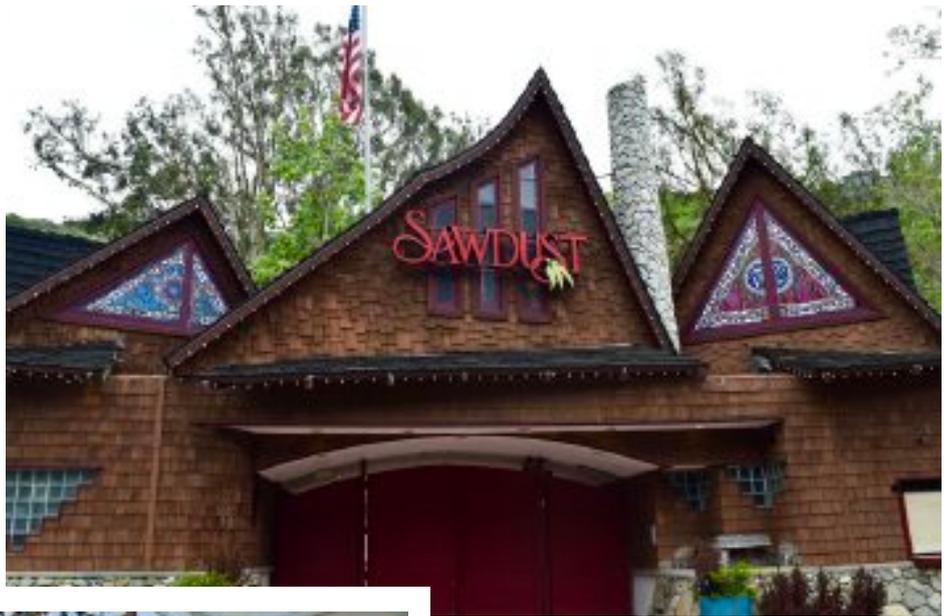
## Laguna Locals

Since 1965, Sawdust Art Festival has been carving its own path, created as an alternative to the ever-popular Festival of Arts that some felt was too exclusive at the time. In the last 60 years, the festival has made a strong name for itself, drawing visitors from Laguna Beach and beyond with its flagship summer show (though Spring Fling and Winter Fantasy iterations have also been added to the lineup).

As the only one of the town's three major festivals to accept only Laguna-based artists, Sawdust is truly a local's spot, showcasing the works of residents and their neighbors in a three-acre eucalyptus grove—a whimsical space filled with waterfalls, handcrafted booths and rustic wood chips scattered across the grounds.

"Sawdust Art Festival is the heart of the Laguna Beach art community," says Josh King, the president of the Sawdust Art Festival Board of Directors. "Each of our nearly 200 exhibiting artists has a story behind their craft. And no two years are ever the same. Festival-goers come and there is simply awe, inspiration and art at every turn."

A dozen new artists are on exhibit at the picturesque grounds this season, presenting everything from paintings and illustrations to sculptures. By keeping the focus on the artists living and working in Laguna Beach, Sawdust supports the local community and celebrates the artistic talent found within. "This commitment allows us to cultivate a truly local and authentic experience, where guests can connect directly



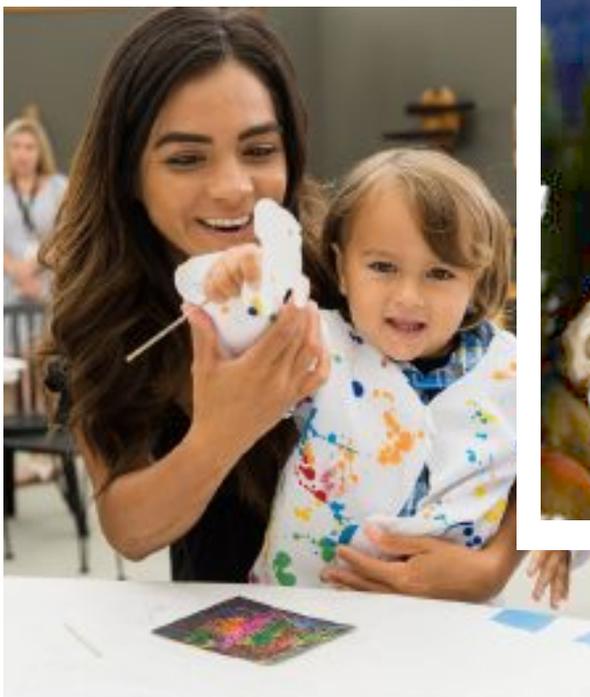
Sawdust exterior



FOA ArtExhibit. Credit Kyle Fierro



BACKSTAGE LOVERS IN A PARK. CREDIT: GABRIEL SULLIVAN



Mom and child at FOA art class

with the artists who live and create here," King explains. "It's one of the things that makes Sawdust unlike any other art festival in the country."

Guests are invited to explore their inner artists with interactive experiences ranging from sewing, palette knife painting and acrylic pouring to more intricate workshops, such as glassblowing and pottery wheel throwing. Artist demonstrations also take place throughout, with a glassblowing cage always serving as a main attraction. Plus, daily live music, magic shows and strolling balloon artists help provide entertainment around every turn.

One of the most exciting partnerships this year is a space designed by local Asian fusion restaurant Starfish. "The Cove is a vibrant alcove alive with music, color, aromas and flavors," King notes. On the menu, find a lineup of dumplings, sushi rolls, banh mi sandwiches, hearty bowls and light snacks as well as kid's items and premium rice liquor-based cocktails, available through the end of the festival on Aug. 31.

"We know that fellow residents appreciate that the Sawdust is a place to meet friends [or] bring visitors and can take the time to stop and really explore the art and get to know their neighborhood artists," King says. "To all our fellow Lagunans, we say, 'We'll see you at The 'Dust.'"

## Bringing Art to Life

Few festivals in the country are as unique and enthralling as Festival of Arts, with a history that dates all the way back to the 1930s. This is largely due to the Pageant of the Masters, a stage

spectacular that draws a quarter of a million people each summer.

Recreating famous pieces of art with real people using elaborate sets, props and makeup, this production continues to be one of the most remarkable performances you'll find in Southern California this summer. One of the reasons that this show keeps visitors returning is its ability to reinvent itself, with a new theme and distinct artwork each time.

"The show is very different from year to year," says Diane Challis Davy, the pageant's longtime director. "I strongly advise the locals to come and check out this particular show—there's a lot that will appeal to them, including the music, which is more contemporary than in the past." One of the things that will be most appealing in "Gold Coast: Treasures of California" is the tableau depicting the Marine Room Tavern, Laguna's oldest bar, located less than a mile from the festival grounds.

This year's production is unique in that it will highlight California landmarks in addition to famous paintings and sculptures as well as feature a partnership with the Hilbert Museum of California Art at Chapman University in Orange. "Mr. Hilbert is the most accessible museum director—so eager to share his collection," Challis Davy notes. "... We had a connection in that the pageant presented [a] Millard Sheets mosaic as a living picture in 2018. Mark will tell you the story about how his wife saw the banner out front of the Festival of Arts, which prompted the Hilberts to save the mosaic from demolition."

Possibly most exciting of all is that the pageant isn't the only thing Festival of Arts has to offer. There's a juried art show featuring one-of-a-kind pieces from more than 100 artists from Orange County (including 16 who are new to the festival), a junior exhibition, live music series, participatory art classes for youth and adults, an annual fashion show, a benefit concert and special events such as Art, Jazz, Wine and Chocolate.

"I hope guests leave feeling inspired and connected—whether it's by discovering a new favorite artist, having a meaningful conversation at a booth or simply soaking in the atmosphere of art, music and community," says Sharbie Higuchi, Festival of Art's public relations, marketing and merchandising director. "There's something truly special about being able to meet the artists behind the work and hear their stories firsthand—it makes the experience so much more personal and memorable."

New this year is the Battle of the Arts, where musicians face off on dueling pianos while artists paint live in front of the audience. "It's going to be fun, unexpected and totally different from anything we've done before," Higuchi says. "...



Top: Credit of Laguna Art-A-Fair  
Right: Lowres. Credit of Laguna Art-A-Fair



Music by GraceKelly. Credit Darnell Wade

Whether it's someone's first visit or their 50th, I want them to walk away with a deeper appreciation for the arts and a sense that they were part of something uniquely Laguna—something creative, welcoming and unforgettable."

Both the pageant and the festival run through Aug. 29, with performances at 8:30 p.m. nightly.

#### A Global Perspective

Those in search of enticing art from around the world will want to visit Laguna Art-A-Fair, the only one of the festivals that allows artists from outside of Southern California to participate. With more than 100 artists on display—and 37 first-time exhibitors—visitors can see pieces created in many different places, from Orange County to China and South Africa.

"During our first week, we received numerous comments from repeat patrons that this year's wide diversity and quality of art is the best they've ever seen at Laguna Art-A-Fair," Nadler notes.

While gaining a global perspective is a huge part of LAAF's offerings, a new nonprofit called the Laguna Art International Foundation is focused on helping young artists right here in Orange County. Just launched this year, the organization, which has a booth at the summer festival, intends to provide mentorship to aspiring artists in the area. Stop by the booth to view a rotating selection of more than 200 creative pieces made by students from Laguna Beach High School, Laguna Hills High

School and Thurston Middle School through the end of the festival on Aug. 31.

As with the other festivals in town, AAF offers hands-on workshops that allow visitors to try learning a new skill or improving upon an existing talent. More than 27 four-hour classes are offered, ensuring variety that ranges from oil painting, watercolor pencil and mixed media to basketry, jewelry-making, collage and more. "This summer's lineup is proving to be especially compelling," Nadler says. "We are seeing a high number of people enrolling in multiple different workshops—two or three is typical, but four to six isn't unusual [this season] and a number of people have registered for nine or more classes."

In addition to viewing the artwork and making some yourself, visitors can embrace several special themed days. Experience country line dancing, ice cream days, Incan culture and beyond. Live music is also available, covering genres like pop, rock, jazz, classical, Latin and reggae. When wandering the grounds has you working up an appetite, stop by Seven7Seven Restaurant, a casual-chic venue open daily with personal pizzas, handhelds, charcuterie boards, wraps and beignets. A nearby bar also offers the festival's signature margaritas.

"If I was forced to say just one favorite thing, it's the wide diversity and uniqueness of the artwork of our exhibitors," Nadler adds. "That's what our repeat visitors always say is ... their favorite, ... and this year's offerings are the best in our 59-year history."