

# TIMES COLONIST

## Sooke Fine Arts Show set for its 30th run

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A steel and orange suede lounge chair created by Cowichan Valley artist Ben Verduin. It can be yours for \$75,000.  
Photograph By Submitted

**What:** Sooke Fine Arts Show

**When:** Preview tonight. Opens Friday, continues to Aug. 1

**Where:** Seaparc Leisure Complex, 2168 Phillips Rd., Sooke

**Admission:** \$8 adults, \$7 youth/seniors (preview is \$30). More info at [sookefinearts.com](http://sookefinearts.com/) (<http://sookefinearts.com/>)

The bargains start at \$200. And the most expensive item? It's a \$75,000 lounge chair that looks like something from *A Clockwork Orange*.

"It's very futuristic looking," said Catherine Keogan, executive director of the Sooke Fine Arts Show.

The steel and orange suede chair was created by Ben Verduin, a Cowichan Valley artist who is a former professional motorcycle racer and classic-car restorer. Verduin said his lounge chair, *Amazone*, is the prototype in a series of 10 high-end chairs he intends to build. It was built over three months.

Some 375 works by B.C. artists, winnowed down from 1,400 submissions, were selected by a three-person jury for the 30th annual Sooke Fine Arts Show. The items, all for sale, have a combined price of \$750,000. It's a record-setting amount, as far as Keogan knows.

About 8,500 art-lovers are expected to attend the show at Seaparc Leisure Complex, a 16,000-square-foot hockey rink that has become a giant art salon.

"We transform it completely," Keogan said. "You would not see a hockey arena when you walk through the doors."

Contributing artists are all from islands on British Columbia's West Coast, including Haida Gwaii (no submissions from non-island people are allowed).

Hundreds of artists arrived at the rink on July 9 to oversee the load-in of their works, handled by white-gloved porters. An army of 300 volunteers, all from the Sooke area, have worked 10,000 hours to stage the show. Among them are crane drivers, designers, art historians, bankers, merchants, teachers and artists.

The motto for the Sooke Fine Arts Show is "small town, big art." It's an impressively large art show, especially considering Sooke's population is just 12,000. Keogan said visitors arrive from all over Canada and as far south as California for the event. "Certainly, I know if we can get someone through that door, they're fans for life. There's a lot of people who will even plan their vacations to the Island around it," she said.

As well as paintings, prints and sculptures, the Sooke Fine Arts Show hosts ceramics, glasswork, fibre art, jewelry and photography. Among the more unusual submissions is an interactive work with magnetic pieces, said Keogan, noting: "Guests can move the portions around to create the art itself."

To mark the 30th anniversary, the show's board commissioned a \$20,000 sculpture by Coast Salish artist Chris Paul, now installed at Seaparc.

It's more than just an art show. There are interactive programs for children, art demonstrations and concerts featuring jazz, bluegrass and folk acts.

This year's jurors are Michael Warren, owner of Victoria's Madrona Gallery, and artists Diana Thorneycroft of Winnipeg and Ben Reeves of Vancouver.

Warren said assessing 1,400 submissions over three days was an exhausting and stressful task. "I was sitting at home at my computer at night, going through this. There were so many," he added.

Many of the artworks are of a type not usually seen in commercial galleries. "Some of the three-dimensional work especially, like textile art. There's some really good textile work in the Sooke show," Warren said.

"It's really quite highly regarded in the province. I think they've done a really good job of evolving the show into something that is a highlight of the summer."

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