A One-Of-A-Kind Art Gallery

It isn't often that an Acadiana resident visits Europe for a summer, stays for 16 years and returns with an art gallery filled with an Italian-speaking business partner.

That's how La Bocage Vert, a one-of-a-kind art gallery in Lafayette that specializes in original prints and prints from an old but renovated house, came to be. It is a story of how Joel Fletcher III, a young artist who apparently enjoys making calculated risks, ventured to Paris and London to teach (during which time he bought a school with a friend) and finally to Florence where he met Giuliano Ceseri.

Ceseri, who ran a distinctive art gallery from his apartment in Florence, recognized Fletcher's unusual interest in collecting fine original prints and drawings on paper and encouraged him to quit teaching and become his business partner.

The political and economic climate in Italy began to worsen and Fletcher suggested a move to the United States. For Fletcher it meant returning home after a broadening experience of traveling abroad. But for Ceseri, it meant adapting to a new society and tackling the task of learning the English language. Fletcher, likewise, learned Italian when he moved to Europe.

Within the past year, the two have acquired quite a reputation in art circles. The growth of their business meant expansion from Fletcher's home (which he shares with his wife) and moving into an old but renovated house that had to be moved from one side of South College Drive to the other.

The result is an unpretentiously elegant showcase of some impressive works of art, including the original water colors of Sam Tuminello, Marininsky, pottery by Dan Girouad, lithographs by John Gould, Selby's birds and florals by Besler. The extensive collection is predominantly confined to 16th through 19th century prints and some 20th century ones.

La Bocage Vert is the type of gallery where there's artwork for every budget - from $5 to $30,000.

When one speaks of this collection of prints, one must almost clarify what type of art is available.

"With the limited edition collection of prints in the United States, there is a misconception that a print cannot be an original, that it must be a reproduction of an artist's work. Every print in our gallery is an original work of art on paper," Fletcher said.

The two men chose to devote their gallery space to original prints for a variety of reasons, one being, "Original prints are getting harder to find. The language. Fletcher, likewise, learned Italian when he moved to Europe.

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