

Art: TRY UNIQUE THIS YEAR

Mary Irene Dolan

GIVE YOUR FAVORITE PEOPLE A GIFT AS
UNIQUE AS THEY ARE AS YOU SHOP AT
LOCAL MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES.



Try a handcrafted mug for coffee and tea lovers on your list.
PHOTO COURTESY CHESTER COUNTY ART ASSOCIATION



Something outside the box for fashion risk takers.
PHOTO COURTESY WAYNE ART CENTER



Give your friends with a green thumb a necklace to match!
PHOTO COURTESY THE DEMUTH MUSEUM

WHERE DO YOU GO TO find the perfect holiday gift for the special folks on your list? Some shoppers head to the nearest mall, superstore or outlet in search of a one-size-fits-all solution. The more community-conscious visit favorite neighborhood boutiques and shops to shop local and shop small.

But this year—and any year, actually—we suggest you step farther outside the box ... and into your local art gallery or museum gift shop.

You'll find much more than just paintings, and you'll have plenty of choices more meaningful than a generic gift card that's never used. Plus local artists and galleries will sing your praises!

ONE OF A KIND

Our overly commercialized holiday culture begs for something with a little more intention. When you gift art, the artists' personalities and style are infused into their creations, producing a personal, memorable gift that you can't find anywhere else.

"You're giving something that no one else has. That's special," says Paul Downie at Community Arts Center in Wallingford. "By carefully selecting artwork just for them, you're telling them you think they're special too!" Make shopping easy with unique handmade fine jewelry and pottery from the Potters Guild and the region's finest artists at the CAC Handcrafted Holiday Sale from December 2 to 10.

In addition to being unique, art can "tell a story, share a memory or an experience that's meaningful to the recipient," notes Sandra Riper from Sunset Hill Jewelers & Fine Art Gallery in West Chester. Maybe an image reminds your loved one of a trip you took together or a painting's message is one you know they'll enjoy seeing every day. And it'll be much more personalized than your typical "Happy Holidays" Hallmark card.

But not all artwork is a practical size for wrapping paper. That's a reason Sunset Hill's 18th Annual Miniature Show (through December 24) is a holiday favorite for gift-friendly sizes and prices. Everything is scaled down—12 x 12 inches or smaller—with original works from 26 local artists on display for purchase.

LOCAL SUPPORT

The season for giving is even better if you give back to the community. And buying art from local galleries gives back in so many ways.

Year round, Wayne Art Center's Gallery Shop does just that by offering space for artists to sell their work. This support is amped up in the annual holiday Craftforms exhibition and sale. The international juried show features art, crafts and more—ceramics, jewelry, glass, fiber, wood, metal, mixed media—all perfect for gifting and on sale, December 2 through January 28.

"Artwork purchased directly effects the local individual artists' well-being as



From prints to canvas, this will be a gift they'll appreciate everyday day.
PHOTO OF VISUAL EXPANSION GALLERY COURTESY OF TIM VAUGHAN



Spark someone's creativity with coloring, activity or art books.
PHOTO COURTESY DELAWARE ART MUSEUM

well as supporting our community-driven art institution,” says Karen Louise Fay. “Thousands of local artists have the opportunity to make a living while creating something beautiful that will be treasured and shared with generations.”

It's not just the artists who benefit; residents do, too. “Buying locally energizes a community,” says Angela Deal Meanix at Chester County Art Association in West Chester. “It supports a culture of connection in a way not found in big box stores. We're that conduit between the artists' vision and the buyers' search for something soulful.”

CCAA has plenty going on to serve as that connection for the holidays. Their Annual Group Art Exhibition 300 & Under is an exhibition for budget-conscious art enthusiasts, with prices at \$300 or less. In addition to their Exton Square store offering goodies, new this year, their Bradford Avenue Gift Shop for the Holidays is stocked with handmade jewelry, pottery, scarves and much more—through December 22.

LOCAL SCENERY

Many Chester County residents value their deep connection with the land and history of our area, and local artists follow suit with creations inspired by their surroundings.

“So many local artists take advantage, study and create work from all our beautiful architecture and landscape,” says Andrea Strang of newly opened Gallery 222 Malvern. “These familiar scenes may invoke a memory from childhood or simply conjure up good emotions.”

Visit their first Annual Kringle Mart Art Show at Malern's Victorian Christmas, December 2 to 3, to find that perfect piece that

speaks to fond experiences or see art inspired by nature on view through December 17.

And for more nostalgic images from well-known names—like Andrew Wyeth and Timlyn Vaughan—Visual Expansion Gallery in West Chester has a selection of over 40 resident artists sure to spark memories with iconic shots for the everything-local fans on your list.

SEE & SHOP

Double your fun by visiting a museum for a day of viewing and shopping. Local museums keep us busy every holiday season with festive tours and exhibits—while their gift shops are packed with artful gifts that go beyond mere art reproductions.

At the Brandywine River Museum of Art, “A Brandywine Christmas” exhibit is running in all its timeless glory, with model

trains and the magnificent Ann Wyeth McCoy dollhouse and antique doll collection, through January 8. The Annual Critter Sale (December 1 to 4) is another must-see, with mini natural ornaments made by volunteers—the perfect unique stocking stuffers!

Their museum gift shop holds even more delights—like beeswax candles from hives in the Brandywine area, hand-painted bird ornaments, recycled wool mittens, hats and gloves, or vintage silverware necklaces.

“The gift of art appeals to those who look to celebrate not only the treasures of the Brandywine Valley,” says the museum's Tamanya Garza, “but the magic of Christmas in this very special place.” And who wouldn't want to be gifted a piece of that magic?

Delaware Art Museum also has some very special things happening this season,



Not sure what you're looking for? Spend the day browsing and maybe treat yourself in the process!
PHOTO COURTESY COMMUNITY ARTS CENTER



PHOTO COURTESY GALLERY 222 MALVERN

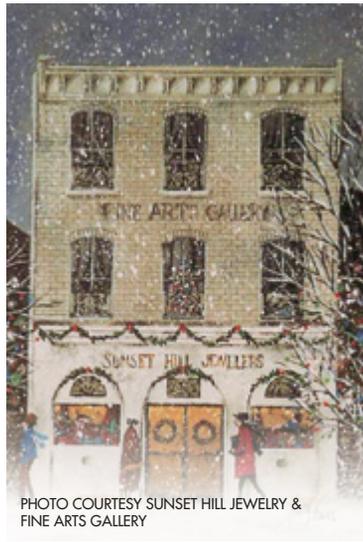


PHOTO COURTESY SUNSET HILL JEWELRY & FINE ARTS GALLERY



PHOTO COURTESY BRANDYWINE RIVER MUSEUM OF ART

like their 30th Annual Holiday House Tour & Winter Arts Festival (December 10-11). Take the tour, then browse 20 unique vendor booths or the museum store.

Sometimes the best gift for your artistic friends is one that sparks their own creativity. From coloring books, doodle boxes, ergonomic crayons to hold in either hand, to books, games, prints and more—Delaware Art Museum's gift shop will get you and your

gifts inspired. Jessica Jenkins sees these gifts as a means to “contemplate the beauty around you and express your own creative side.”

In Lancaster, The Demuth Museum's Holiday Gift Shop is bursting with interesting, creative finds, too—handmade felted soaps, woodcut prints of seasonal scenes, and living floral jewelry made from succulents to name a few.

And while you're picking out something

special, don't miss their much-loved holiday tradition, “Trees Galore” with a Willy Wonka Wonderland theme, through December 9. The mini trees decorated by local designers and handmade ornaments made by local students are all on sale. ♦

To find out more about current gallery and museum exhibitions, read our Best Local Events section, then get out there and get art shopping!