



Hares by Hunt Slonem. (Deborah Wheeler/The Sun)

## A Southern culture debut at WaterColor

■ Ogden Museum of the South joins community

By Deborah Wheeler

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**T**he South Walton art community has scored a coup with the arrival of Ogden Gallery of Southern Art at WaterColor.

An affiliate of the University of New Orleans and the Smithsonian, tonight's sneak preview opening is the first satellite of the New Orleans-based museum.

The Ogden Museum of Southern Art is considered the largest and most comprehensive collection of Southern art in the world. Established in 1994, the Ogden Museum grew from the purchase of one piece of artwork in 1966 to an extensive private collection, to a traveling exhibit, to what it is today.

Dr. Richard Gruber joined Ogden as its director in 1999.

Gruber said South Walton was chosen as the site of the first Ogden satellite gallery because of its growth, appreciation for the arts and its central proximity to all Southern states.

As a visitor to the area for some years, Gruber said he has been watching South Walton since the 1980s, with an interest in the area's architectural design, who is here, and what is happening here.

"Through fortuitous encounters, we found a way to make it happen (with us coming here)," said Gruber. "WaterColor had an interest in art and we're coming into the old Cerulean's space in the center of things on 30A. It's a great partnership."

Gruber said the Ogden at WaterColor will follow in the footsteps of its home base in hosting frequent events such as Ogden After Hours to address Southern culture and all its spectrums, educational events, and music.

Instead of being only a WaterColor establishment, Gruber has been in talks with representatives of Seaside, Rosemary Beach and Alys Beach with a view toward the museum becoming a co-operative venture to include all South Walton communities.

"We will explore ways to tap into the art that's here," said Gruber. "We see a future here as the area develops and grows and we wanted to tap into what is happening in Florida."



Eileen West in front of Hunt Slonem's Monkey Eyes. (Deborah Wheeler/The Sun)

Directing the gallery will be Eileen West, a former New Orleans resident, Seaside gallery owner and artist. West has a Bachelors of Arts degree in studio art from the University of West Florida and a Bachelor's of Fine Arts from Sophie Newcomb at Tulane. West has been instrumental in spearheading arts events at Seaside, such as the monthly First Friday Artwalk.

At this initial opening, the museum will be showing the work of two Southern artists: Hunt Slonem and photographer Richard Sexton.

Sexton is a former resident of New Orleans but is now residing in Seaside. He is known for his native landscape and architectural photos.

Slonem is known for his animal-themed abstracts in bright colors. He works in oils, watercolors, and sculpts in acrylic resin and wood.

In addition to the museum, its 2,000-square feet of space will also house retail space with hanging artwork for sale, as well as jewelry, glass and clay pieces, and souvenir items such as artsy potholders.