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## An Artistic Half-Century

One of Las Cruces' oldest arts groups will celebrate a half-century with an invitational commemorative exhibition at the Branigan Cultural Center, opening Nov. 2 with a reception from 5-7 p.m. "The Las Cruces Arts Association: Celebrating 50 Years of Arts Innovation" will be on exhibit until Nov. 24. The exhibit includes works in oil, acrylic, watercolor, pastels, photography, fiber arts, sculpture and mixed media. A continuously running video features significant moments in the history of the association. In addition to the show, painter Judy Licht will provide a demonstration in the gallery on Nov. 10. (501 N. Main St., 541-2154, [lascruces.org/museums](http://lascruces.org/museums))

Rayma Claessen, chair of the LCAA history committee and past director three times (1970, 1979, 1993), says, "From its first home on Church Street, to Barker Street (at Avenue de Mesilla), to the newly opened Mountain Gallery & Studios (138 W. Mountain Ave.), the association is just about the oldest public service arts group in Las Cruces."

Founded in 1962, the group started as the Las Cruces Arts and Crafts Association. Says Claessen, "From the beginning, members sought a way to communicate with other artists and be of service in the arts."

During its first four years, the association sponsored regular exhibits at the Town and Country Restaurant Ballroom on Main Street. It also held annual open-air exhibits at the Mesilla Plaza and the Midway Shopping Center.

In 1965 the association began its tradition of sponsoring shows for student artists. Early student exhibitors included Sallie Ritter, Sherry Doil-Carter and Orlando Di Matteo, locally well-known artists today. "One of our treasured projects is working with young artists, a goal that has proven challenging, but rewarding," says Claessen. In recent years the association has sponsored several high school art exhibits and a BFA exhibit at New Mexico State University.

By 1966, the group was meeting at the Holiday Inn, now the Ramada Inn, and displaying art in its banquet room. The group also began holding art festivals at the Loretto Shopping Center Mall.

Since its earliest days, LCAA has attracted between 70 and 90 members with its concept of artistic camaraderie and art promotion in the Las Cruces-Mesilla community.

Today, the association offers a home to both seasoned professionals and new artists looking to exchange ideas and nurture talent. LCAA artists participate in the group's regional and local exhibits as well as fairs, festivals and service projects. The association hosts monthly exhibits at the Mountain Gallery, and an annual judged member show.

Portrait sessions at the Las Cruces Art Museum provide opportunities to draw and paint for members and the public. Sessions are held the second and fourth Thursdays of each month, August through May, 9:30-11:30 a.m. in the upstairs painting room. The cost is \$3 to cover the cost of the live model.

Also open to the public are workshops and meetings with guest artist presentations, both providing educational and outreach programs to the community as well as to members. Regular meetings are the third Sunday of each month at 1 p.m. The November meeting at the Mountain Gallery will feature Deidre Schaub with her demonstration called "Riff-Raff." December's meeting will be the usual Christmas program with music. For more information, email Margaret Bernstein at [margaretpaints@yahoo.com](mailto:margaretpaints@yahoo.com).