

TOUCHSTONE GALLERY

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TOUCHSTONE GALLERY HISTORY

Founded in 1976 by 30 artists, Touchstone Gallery opened in a large gallery space on P Street NW. At the time, P Street was the primary gallery area in Washington (including Gallery K, Studio Gallery, Jane Haslem, Henri Gallery, Mittendorf Gallery.) Janet Wheeler is the only current member of the original founders. Early in its history, Touchstone demonstrated its close ties with the larger community: it participated in the International Sculpture Center's Washington conference by installing sculpture on the sidewalk; it provided dozens of small paintings to the homeless shelter on D St. NW founded by Mitch Snyder, held an art auction for famine relief for Oxfam. After 14 years of success on P Street, most of the other galleries had migrated to R Street, and Touchstone joined them, securing the last gallery space in that Dupont Circle gallery area.

Our space configuration drastically changed. The artists had to gut and renovate the two stories formerly occupied by Toast and Strawberries on R Street. We enjoyed a prosperous half decade there, offering among our outreach activities a show of the artwork of the children of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, and a community outreach program inviting passersby to stop by and use our resources and members to make art. But we soon chafed at the constricted space of our second venue, and moved to 7th Street and the most spacious quarters in our history (and perhaps in all of Washington) into a building of galleries (taking the space formerly occupied by Jane Haslem's Gallery we joined David Adamson, Baumgartner, Apartment Zero.)

We enjoyed the space, stayed afloat for about 15 years, hosted poetry readings, wine tastings, Fringe Festival performances, exhibitions of Very Special Arts, and the graduating seniors of Duke Ellington High School of the Arts. And then the landlord ousted us to refurbish the building for upscale tenants. Feeling the increasing pressures of the foundering economy, we realized we could not afford the inflated rents the landlord would demand. All of the other galleries in the building had either closed or moved, and we closed our doors in October 2009.

For almost a year, our excellent director maintained Touchstone as a virtual gallery - keeping member enthusiasm high by finding venues where we could show as a group and keeping a high web profile - until August 14 when we moved into our newest venue -901 New York Ave NW Washington DC 20001. We have a sidewalk-level entrance and a gallery built to our specifications. It is the most elegant space we have occupied and has necessitated an increase in our membership. We are dedicated to maintaining our reputation as a tough gallery to get into, because our first concern is as it has always been an unwavering commitment to high aesthetic standards.