

PUBLIC ART

An iron homage



GRACE BEAHM ALFORD

Artist Fred Wilson discusses his sculpture “Omniscience” with New York visitors Dolores Amodeo (center) and Tina Amato (right) after its unveiling outside the Gibbes Museum in Charleston on Sept. 29.

Gibbes Museum boasts new outdoor public sculpture

BY ADAM PARKER
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When artist Fred Wilson came to Charleston the first time in 2019 to deliver a lecture and prepare for an exhibition at the Gibbes Museum of Art, a particular object downtown caught his eye.

Wilson, famous around the world for his critical scrutiny of the Maryland Historical Society collection in 1992, was a passenger in the car of Gibbes Director Angela Mack. She was driving him around, showing him parts of the city, orienting him to Charleston’s geography and history, she said.

On Lower King Street, they came to the Miles Brewton House, a Georgian structure with an imposing wrought-iron fence meant to protect the property from intruders. Brewton equipped his house



ADAM PARKER/STAFF

“Omniscience” by artist Fred Wilson now is installed outside the Gibbes Museum.

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EDUCATION

Gallien suing CCSD

Board ‘seriously interfered’ with the superintendent’s ability to perform, suit says

BY HILLARY FLYNN
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Charleston County Superintendent Eric Gallien filed a lawsuit against the school district for breach of contract Oct. 5, claiming the board “seriously interfered” with his ability to operate and manage the district.

The legal challenge comes almost two weeks after the board placed Gallien on paid leave as a complaint against him is investigated.

The suit makes a variety of charges, including that the board violated his employment contract and contradicted board policies.

The complaint additionally states that “if and when” Gallien returns to work, a controversy will still exist between him and the five board members who voted to put him on suspension.

The lawsuit notes that the faction was endorsed by the conservative parents’ rights group Moms for Liberty.

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REAL ESTATE

Beaufort has eye on land in Bluffton

But is recent property value jump worth price?

BY JESSICA WADE
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BEAUFORT — The county has been offered a \$650,000 discount on a Bluffton property that it’s had its eye on for years. However, the reduced cost is nearly double the price last paid for the property when it sold earlier this summer.

Beaufort County Council will vote Oct. 9 on the purchase of a 41-acre parcel on Ulmer Road adjacent to Bailey Memorial Park. The original asking price was \$3.15 million, a value determined by an appraisal completed at the direction of former County Administrator Eric Greenway.

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ENVIRONMENT

Sizzling September follows record-smashing hot summer

Scientists calling it ‘mind-blowing’

BY SETH BORENSTEIN
Associated Press

After a summer of record-smashing heat, warming somehow got even worse in September as Earth set a new mark for how far above nor-

mal temperatures were, the European climate agency reported Thursday.

Last month’s average temperature was 1.7 degrees Fahrenheit above the 1991-2020 average for September. That’s the warmest margin

above average for a month in 83 years of records kept by the European Space Agency’s Copernicus Climate Change Service.

“It’s just mind-blowing really,” said Copernicus Director Carlo Buontempo. “Never seen anything like that in any month in our records.”

While July and August

had hotter raw temperatures because they are warmer months on the calendar, September had what scientists call the biggest anomaly, or departure from normal. Temperature anomalies are crucial pieces of data in a warming world.

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A man cools off late last month in a shower at Ipanema Beach, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

FILE/AP

Inside

OPINION

The state is trying to strike a balance between conservation and recreation on Deveau Bank Seabird Sanctuary and other spits of land along our coast. It’s an important effort because we must protect these critical habitats.

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LOCAL

Chas. Southern welcomes new president. **A4**

LOCAL

Graham, harbor pilots oppose slowing boats. **A5**

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VP Harris to speak Oct. 11 at College of Charleston

BY CAITLIN BYRD
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Vice President Kamala Harris is adding a South Carolina stop to her nationwide college tour, appearing next week at the College of Charleston as part of a broader appeal to connect with young voters ahead of an election year.

A White House official confirmed to The Post and Courier the vice president was adamant about adding a South Carolina school to her month-long college tour.

The Oct. 11 appearance in Charleston is her first visit to a public liberal arts college and her seventh stop as part of the “Fight for Our Freedoms” tour.

“This generation is critical to the urgent issues that are at stake right now for our future,” Harris said in a previous statement about the tour. “It is young leaders throughout America who know what the solutions look like and are organizing in their communities to make them a reality.” Harris added “My message to students is clear: We are



FILE/GAVIN MCINTYRE/STAFF

Vice President Kamala Harris delivered the keynote speech at South Carolina State University's Fall Convocation in Orangeburg.

counting on you, we need you, you are everything.”

So far, the effort has taken Harris to universities, historically Black colleges, community colleges, apprenticeship programs and Hispanic-serving institutions in Virginia,

North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Florida and Georgia. Future plans include schools in Nevada and Arizona.

The upcoming trip will be the vice president's fifth visit to South Carolina while in office and her second to the Pal-

metto State this year. The last time was seven months ago when she joined U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., to promote the Biden administration's ongoing work to expand affordable high-speed internet. This time Harris will turn

her focus back to the state's youngest voters and discuss issues the administration sees as most pressing for these voters ahead of 2024.

In 2022, Harris met with students at two historically Black colleges before addressing S.C. State University students about the importance of voting ahead of the mid-term elections.

During that stop, she told students “In moments of great crisis, our nation has almost every time turned to our young leaders to help guide us forward.”

The stops on the college tour have been lively events that featured DJ's, live music, cheerleaders and marching bands.

In Florida, rapper Fat Joe and actor and singer Anthony Ramos moderated a discussion with Harris in front of students at Florida International University.

During the tour, Harris frequently takes questions from students and moderators about topics like climate change, guns, reproductive rights, book bans, mental

health, and LGBTQ+ equality.

Youth voter participation has reached historic levels in recent election cycles, with a majority backing Democratic candidates.

In the 2020 presidential election, South Carolina saw its youth voter turnout rate increase by 10 percentage points, with 45 percent of voters 18-29 casting ballots when compared to 2016.

But during the most recent 2022 midterm election, that voter turnout dipped to 18.4 percent among young voters.

Harris made history when she became the first woman, the first Black American and the first Asian-American to serve as vice president.

A graduate of Howard University, Harris is also the first HBCU graduate elected vice president of the United States, a fact that got a big applause from students when she alluded to it during her stop at S.C. State University last year.

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Graham joins harbor pilots against boat-slowing rule

Would protect endangered whale

BY CLARE FIESELER
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As North Atlantic right whales begin their annual migration toward South Carolina's waters, a Palmetto State senator is leaning into his opposition to proposed vessel restrictions meant to protect the critically endangered animals.

“To mandate 10 knots (of speed) is going to put the lives of these men and women (pilots) at risk to no benefit of the whale,” Sen. Lindsey Graham said Oct. 5 while touring the docks and facility of the Charleston Branch Pilots Association. The facility sits on Charleston Harbor overlooking the city's iconic Arthur Ravenel Jr. bridge.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced in July 2023 a potential rule change that would expand current seasonal speed restrictions to all vessels that are at least 35 feet in length. The agency is also considering the expansion in size of existing “slow zones.” Ship collisions are among the most dire threats to the survival of the whale, according to agency scientists.

For more than a decade, speed restrictions have been in place for large boats operating anywhere along the South Carolina coast around calving season. Boats over 65 feet in length must slow to about 12 mph or less from Nov. 1 to April 30. Last year, NOAA proposed to expand the restrictions to smaller boats, those between 35 and 65 feet in length. NOAA contends

that applying restrictions to boats this size could eliminate 90 percent of vessel strikes.

Small boats in South Carolina and Florida have struck right whales in recent years, including a 2021 strike in Florida that killed a calf. Both of South Carolina's U.S. senators, Graham and Tim Scott, spoke out last year against NOAA's proposal for expanded restrictions. They cited economic and efficiency costs to the state's maritime economies.

What's different this year was Graham's increased focus on pilot safety.

Clay Diamond, executive director of the American Pilots' Association, was also at the briefing. He, too, stressed the importance of maintaining pilot safety along with whale safety.

“We have worked with NOAA to adapt and comply with its current North Atlantic Right Whale 10-knot speed restrictions on larger vessels, which apply seasonally for roughly six months out of the year,” said Diamond, who explained that maneuvering vessels within harbors and shipping channels often requires speed to make agile turns. “But what NOAA is proposing for new (whale) speed regulations, however, will endanger pilots, undermine navigation safety and hinder pilots' efforts to protect the marine environment.”

Graham was forceful in his opposition, saying at one point in front of a handful of Charleston harbor pilots: “I'm all over this ... frankly, it's the stupidest rule I've



CLARE FIESELER/STAFF

Sen. Lindsey Graham speaks Oct. 5 at the Harbor Pilots Association in Charleston in opposition of a proposed rule that further restricts vessel speeds to protect the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale.

ever heard of.”

Advocates see the situation as more dire. For the second time in less than a year, a coalition of environmental groups has filed an emergency petition demanding the U.S. Department of Commerce implement, among other things, newly proposed speed restriction for small boats. The groups are asking for small boats between 35 and 65 feet in length to be forced to slow down “immediately.”

The first emergency petition was filed Dec. 6. NOAA denied that request to immediately apply new rules.

The agency said at the time via public documents that it was focused on “long-term, substantive vessel strike risk reduction measures.” NOAA received more than 90,000 comments on the proposed rule and is using them to inform its final action. Many experts are exploring better technology to effectively track the whales' location, too. Graham supports this but sees it as a wholesale alternative to the vessel-slowing rules.

“The best thing to do to save a whale is to come up with better technology to locate whales to pass that informa-

tion on to ships. That's my proposal,” Graham said.

The Department of Commerce did not return a request for comment on the senator's opposition and alternative proposal. NOAA, which sits within the Department of Commerce, is expected to pass the new speed rules sometime this year.

Environmental groups argue it's critically important to get the new rules on the books before the upcoming calving season, when the whales migrate hundreds of miles from waters off New England and Canada to their

calving grounds off Florida and Georgia. The whales migrate through South Carolina waters annually, and there is some evidence that their breeding grounds have expanded northward to include the Carolinas, perhaps due to climate change.

Calving season officially starts Nov. 1, but the elusive whales sometimes show up when they please. Last year, the first whales arrived to the Southeast calving grounds in early December.

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Gibbes Museum boasts new outdoor public sculpture by artist Wilson

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with a fence that included a feature called a cheval-de-frise, which derives from medieval cavalry warfare. These are multidirectional spikes that make it dangerous to scale the fence. The wealthy 18th century slave trader was concerned about the potential for organized rebellions.

Wilson already had been thinking about making a sculpture with iron, he said. And he had been asked to consider the life of Omar ibn Said, a Muslim scholar who had been enslaved in 1807 and brought to Charleston. In 2020, Spoleto Festival USA was set to premiere a new opera based on Omar ibn Said's slim autobiography, and efforts were afoot to complement the production with related projects.

After receiving the Gibbes' commission for a new sculpture, it didn't take Wilson very long to submit his sketches for consideration.

The work, called “Omniscience,” is now on view in front of the museum. It was dedicated Sept. 29 with the

artist present, along with various civic leaders and dignitaries.

It is a rare piece of contemporary public art in Charleston. The city has a number of murals by David Boatwright, Shepard Fairey and others, and an area in the Avondale neighborhood where colorful wall paintings are clustered. And it now has an artistically rendered landscape by Walter Hood surrounding the recently opened International African American Museum. But it has little else in the way of large-scale public displays of art.

“Omniscience” was designed by Wilson and manufactured by students at the American College of the Building Arts. It is reminiscent of a cage, with spikes at the top, and a version of Omar ibn Said's manuscript, its elegant Arabic script and pages fluttering in the breeze, afloat in the middle. It is both homage to the character of the enslaved Muslim and to the cruelty of the Charleston slave system.

It's an exercise in juxtaposition, Wilson said.



GRACE BEAHM ALFORD/STAFF

“Omniscience” by Fred Wilson now is installed outside the Gibbes Museum in Charleston.

“People don't realize they've been walking by these things all the time,” he said, referring to the cheval-de-frise atop fences and other remnants of past injustices.

The juxtapositions are multiple.

The new sculpture stands nearly 16 feet high, and it's positioned across the street from where, in December 1860, South Carolina's Ordinance of Secession was adopted.

The Arabic text references literacy, faith, scholarship

and independence, yet it's enclosed within iron bars.

The bars themselves referencing work by important African American blacksmiths and artisans, such as local Philip Simmons, who became masters of their trade during a long period of legally enforced subservience.

One of Wilson's great-great-great-grandfathers, Achilles Dixon, was a blacksmith likely born into slavery, he said.

More generally, the piece is simultaneously beautiful,

with its iron curlicues and elegant stature, and disturbing, with its connotations of imprisonment and torture.

Wilson first gained fame after the Maryland Historical Society invited him to interpret its collection. “Mining the Museum” was a conscious act of deconstruction that revealed institutional biases and the ways that museums ignore a variety of narratives not considered mainstream. And it was a wake-up call. Suddenly, museum officials were examining their collections and scrutinizing their exhibition practices.

The Gibbes was not immune. In 2009, it commissioned Juan Logan and Susan Harbage Page to create an installation called “Prop Master” using objects from the permanent collection. The artists were free to do as they pleased, and what they did was provocative and illuminating. Among other things, it revealed how few objects in the collection were by Black artists.

Ten years later, the Gibbes went straight to the source, inviting Wilson to participate

in its Distinguished Lecture Series and arranging a show meant to complement Spoleto Festival's “Omar” production.

“Afro Kismet,” first prepared for the 2017 Istanbul biennial, was an investigation of the contributions of Africans to the Ottoman Empire. It challenged commonly held notions of culture and society, highlighting contributions of Black Africans to a cosmopolitan city that was, for centuries, a vibrant crossroads of economic and artistic activity.

It seemed apropos given the African and Muslim references, but the COVID-19 pandemic interfered, prompting a change of plans. Instead of “Afro Kismet,” the Gibbes commissioned “Omniscience.”

The sculpture was unveiled inside the museum building in May 2022, tweaked and finished at the American College of the Building Arts, then installed along Meeting Street for all to see.

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