

# Hidden Gem: St. Ann Arts and Cultural Center

Though seated prominently on Cumberland Street in Woonsocket, a spot many residents drive by every day, St. Ann Arts and Cultural Center is indeed, a hidden gem. Woonsocket's own "Sistine Chapel" is in fact, overlooked by many and a surprising number of native Rhode Islanders are unaware of the beauty that awaits inside.

Stepping inside St. Ann may be as close as any visitor to Woonsocket can get to heaven on earth.

Just about every inch of the 93-year-old church is decorated with intricate frescos, oil paintings and stained glass windows. Built in 1918 and painted in 1940, the former church, which is now an arts and cultural center, claims the largest collection of fresco paintings in the United States. Its artist, a hunchback named Guido Nincheri, plastered and painted the walls by hand for \$25,000 in 1940.

Concrete painted columns appear to be fine Italian marble as they stretch 60 feet into the air, supporting the ceiling. The intricate stained glass windows appear three-dimensional. The pastel colored frescos show a deft hand, the physiques of the bodies are physically accurate, highly detailed and Michelangelo-like in their poses.

Nincheri used the parishioners' faces as the faces of the figures in the paintings, making the building into a massive scrapbook of the French-Canadian mill workers that collected and donated nickels and dimes to build and decorate their beloved Catholic church.

In 2000, the Diocese of Providence could no longer afford the maintenance costs to keep the church active. Afraid that the church may be destroyed, the [St. Ann Arts and Cultural Center](#) was formed. The concerned individuals that made up the Center leased the building until 2007, when the Diocese turned ownership of the building over to the nonprofit group. Today, the church is open on Sundays from 1 - 4 p.m. for guided tours. St. Ann's was named an [Editor's Choice: Best of New England](#) by Yankee Magazine in

**2011.** Run as a nonprofit organization, the center can also be rented for events (including weddings,) and holds many local fundraisers and celebrations.

















