



2x20



Works by 20 of Kentucky's Finest Working Folk Artists

2x20

FOLK ART RESPONDS to the world as it is known by the individuals who create it, and there has been a marked shift in the kinds of art being created by folk (self-taught) artists during the past few decades. Today, when you view contemporary folk art you can still expect to see wood carvings, but alongside those works you will also encounter a startling array of distinctly non-traditional works of art.

2 X 20 presents the work of twenty working, self-taught Kentucky artists as an overview of what is going on in Kentucky today. Viewed together, the 40 works of art in this exhibition demonstrate that the expression found in contemporary folk art is constantly evolving as it reflects on a rapidly changing world.

The idea that folk art commemorates a rural world in perfect balance has always only been partially accurate. While many continue to celebrate the pastoral myth, folk artists have always dealt with a much wider range of concerns. Today, with a heightened awareness of politics and global affairs informed by ubiquitous electronic communication, the interests and preoccupations of self-taught artists are even broader and more diverse. As community has yielded to global awareness, the work of today's folk artists increasingly reflects individuality and the ambiguity of life in the modern age.

Kentucky Folk Art Center (KFAC) was developed around a collection of contemporary self-taught art from Kentucky begun at Morehead State University in 1985. In 1997, KFAC was designated as the official folk art institution of our state. The genesis of the KFAC collection in the mid 1980s was fortuitous because it enabled museum staff to get to know many of the older artists and to study and acquire works directly from them.

Assumptions about those earlier artists are frequently misplaced. Many of them were born into a subsistence environment that depended on an understanding of nature for their survival. But, the world around them changed as they lived through two World Wars and the Great Depression. They witnessed momentous technological developments—telephone, airplanes, radio, television, indoor plumbing, mechanized

farming and space travel, to name a few. Regardless of whether they responded to these developments as negative, as bewildering, advantageous, or awe-inspiring, there can be little doubt that change challenged the artists' understanding of their place in the world.

This exhibition was devised to highlight the further diversification of self-taught art in Kentucky. A few years ago, people were asking us, 'What will happen when all the folk artists have passed away or retired?' *2 x 20* helps us begin to answer that question.

In 1967, Edgar Tolson participated in the first American Folklife Festival on the Mall in Washington, DC. Tolson's carvings created a major stir when his work was seen by cognoscenti of the art world and judged to be art. That represented a major shift in Tolson's own perception of his work and of his role as an "artist" rather than as a practitioner of some traditional craft. Tolson's dawning awareness set the stage for numerous others to value their work as examples of creative human expression instead of as regional trinkets that could be marketed to tourists and others.

In the intervening years, many artists followed suit, either with work that was derivative of Tolson's carvings or with art that bore its own stamp of originality. Self-taught or folk art came to be respected in its own right. Tolson's experience heralded the winds of change, and as society continued to evolve over subsequent decades, urban self-taught artists were also recognized as part of that same, larger community of individuals creating art beyond the influence of fine art tradition. Today, folk art has come of age as a dynamic force to be reckoned with.

Despite popular images of Kentuckians whittling away on the benches in front of the county courthouse, self-taught art in Kentucky has always been a diverse and individualized activity. One has only to look at Charley Kinney's eerie paintings, his brother Noah's funky wood sculptures, Carl McKenzie's startling carvings or Minnie Black's weird gourd assemblages to realize that the creative drive has long found ways to manifest itself in Kentucky. For the purposes of this exhibition, 20 artists were selected to illustrate the diversity of self-taught art in Kentucky in 2012.

As noted earlier, wood carving remains a vital force in Kentucky folk art, but the dual-species animals of Minnie Adkins, the apocalyptic horsemen of Tim Lewis, the totemic imagery of Willie Rascoe, and LaVon Van Williams' ecstatic images of African-American culture are all edgy, innovative, and clearly not traditional. There are also collages, paintings and drawings and sculpture reinvented from someone else's junk.

Half of the twenty featured artists live in cities, in suburbs or in small towns; four of them are African-American. The variety of subject matter in this exhibition lays to rest any notion that contemporary Kentucky folk art is an essentially white, rural art form.

Religious interpretation is alive in the carvings of Tim Lewis and Donny Tolson and in paintings by Jim Gary Phillips, while Barbara Burton offers a reinterpretation of the ancient myth of the Phoenix. Certainly there are comforting memory paintings by Janice Harding Owens and Janice Miller. However, Thad Pinkney takes issue with mountaintop removal mining, and Marvin Francis offers startling images of life as a prison inmate. Other works are whimsical (Lonnie and Twyla Money, Eileen Stockham), mystical or prophetic (Willie Rascoe, Bruce New, Robert Morgan). Still others (LaVon Williams, Joan Dance) provide intimate insights into the experience of African-Americans that is often invisible to those whose lives take place within the boundaries of mainstream American society.

The art speaks for itself as it should—quietly, subtly, or loud and clear—but this exhibition was assembled to profile some new and special work and to illustrate the ongoing evolution of self-taught art as part of the vanguard of cultural change in Kentucky.

Conversations with the artists helped to reveal much about the art. Artists spoke openly of how they got started, their motivations, the significance of art in their lives, and how the work they do affects them personally. Conversations highlighted some clear differences among the artists but, they also demonstrated some surprising common ground.

Several artists refer to religion or faith as a central, determining factor in their lives. One artist meditated on the dilemma faced as the member of a hard shell Baptist church which generally frowns upon the creation of graven images. Emphatically dismissing any suggestion that his art was a spiritual mission, his solution was to maintain a low profile locally so that he could continue his work under the radar.

The most consistent statements came as the artists described their creative process. While each of them approaches their work in a different way, almost all of them observed that they did not know, in advance, how an individual work of art would end up when they first embarked on it. Many of the individual profiles that accompany photographs of their work include quoted descriptions of the transformation that takes place as the actual work proceeds. Several have ideas at the outset, but credit the process of engagement in the work as the real key to what they create. Art emerges, they seem to be saying, when they submit to the impulse to create without thought or constraint.

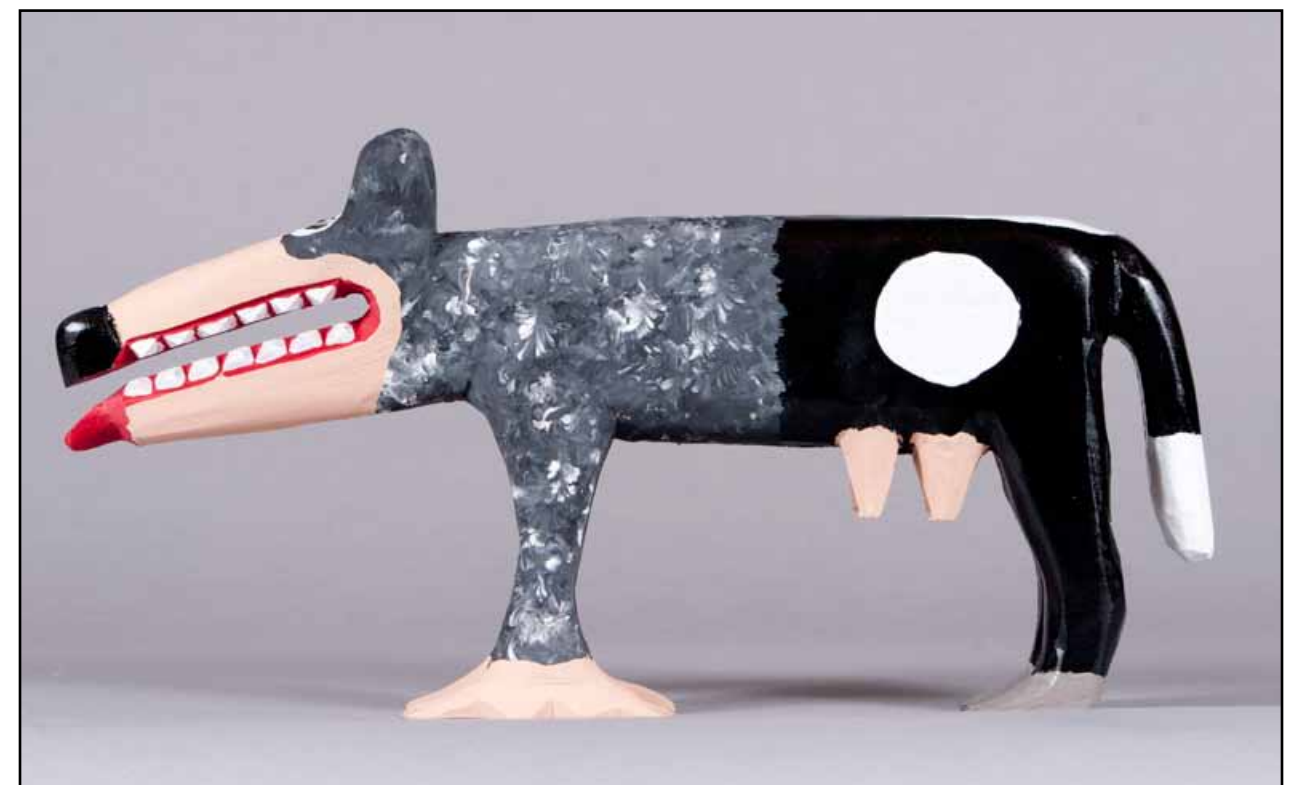
The forty works of art presented here offer a window into the creative minds of twenty self-taught Kentucky artists. The magic that makes a painting, collage or sculpture into a work of art takes place only when they surrender to something larger than themselves.

*~ Adrian Swain
October, 2012*

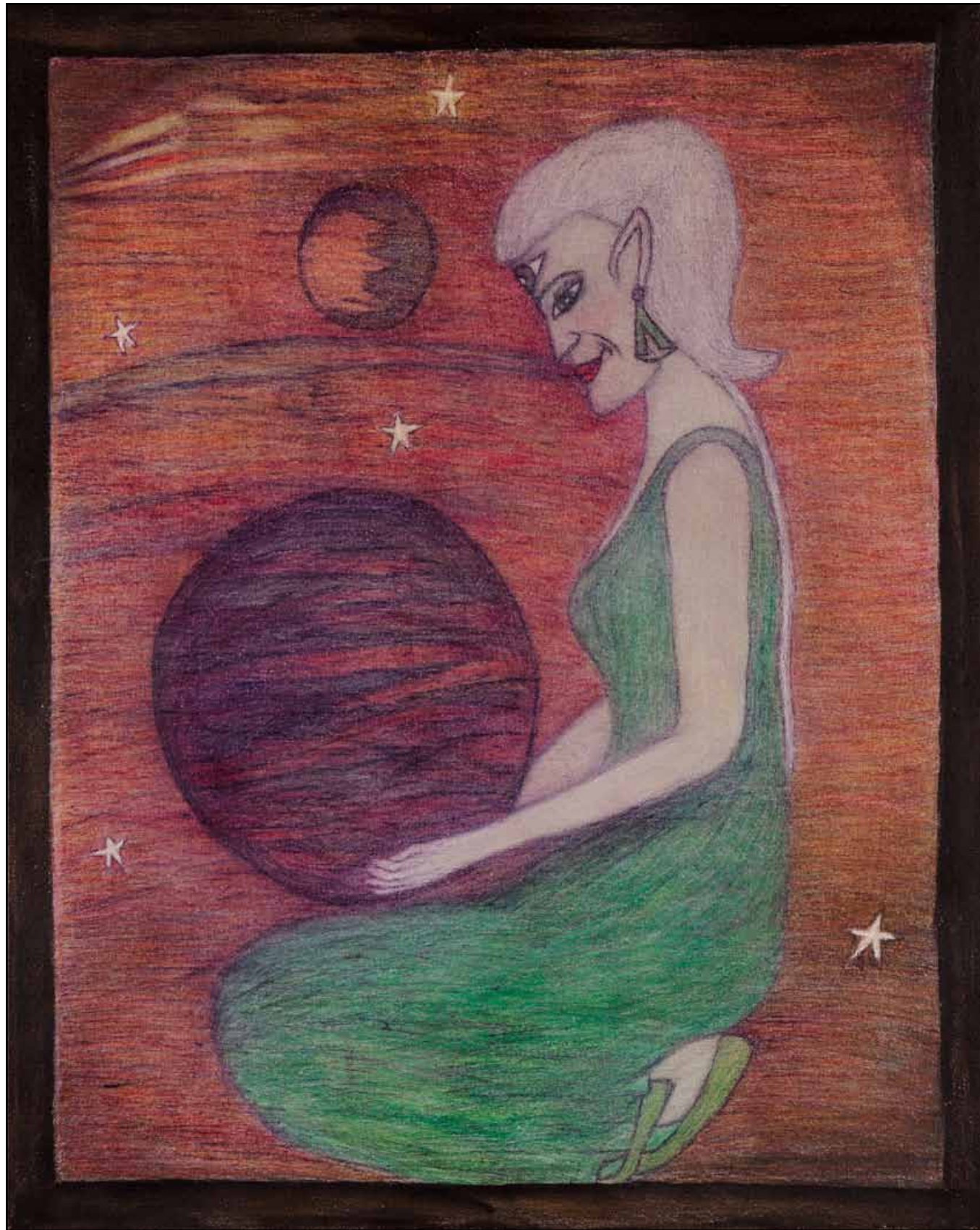
MINNIE ADKINS (b. 1934) is best known for her whimsical painted wood carvings and is widely recognized as the pre-eminent living, Kentucky folk artist. Born in Elliott County, she relocated to Ohio in 1968, but she returned “home” in 1983 and now lives within 200 yards of the childhood home where she was born. A woodcarver since childhood, she began to explore new horizons in her work in the early 1980s following her return from Ohio to Isonville. Since then, her whimsical, painted carvings have been enthusiastically acquired by collectors throughout the country, and many from overseas. Her work has been exhibited widely and is now included in many museum collections. Adkins has also encouraged many up-and-coming self-taught artists to explore their creative potential. Around 1989, she and her late husband and folk art partner, Garland, held the first “Day In The Country” folk art fair at their home in Isonville. The event became an annual fixture in the folk art calendar. “Day In The Country” has been staged in Morehead by Kentucky Folk Art Center since 2003, when she suggested KFAC take over responsibility for the fair. For her art, and for mentoring other artists, Minnie Adkins was recognized as artist of the year in the 1997 Kentucky Governor’s Awards in the Arts. Other awards and recognition includes: the Jane Morton Norton Award for outstanding contribution to the arts in Kentucky, 1992; the Award for Leadership in Arts and Culture from the Eastern Kentucky Leadership Foundation, 1993; Distinguished Artist Award from the Folk Art Society of America, 1993; Appalachian Treasure Award, 1994, and an honorary doctorate, 1998, from Morehead State University.



TIEOX, Minnie Adkins, 2012, Wood & acrylic paint, 6½ x 17½ x 2 \$400



COWSUM, Minnie Adkins, 2012, Wood and acrylic paint, 7 x 13½ x 2, \$400



SPACE AND TIME, Barbara Burton, 2012, Oil paint, black and red ballpoint pens & white china marker, 29³/₄ x 23³/₄, \$700

Barbara Burton (b. 1952) is a native of West Virginia but moved to Kentucky in 1978. A need for creative self-expression led her, for several years, to engage in stream-of-consciousness writing, but she was also drawn to work with her hands. She first considered working with clay but was eventually led to works on paper. She began working with colored pencils around 1999. Not surprisingly, her way of working as a visual artist strongly resembles how she approached the writing that she did. Sometimes she has an idea that motivates her to begin one of her drawings, but often as not, it will end up quite different from that initial vision. In other instances, she simply begins to draw and the image emerges as she is at work on it. Barbara works in an unconventional manner, sitting on her bed with her materials spread around her. She says she is not a detail person. Once engaged in the work, she describes her progress as conscious but only to a point. Some drawings resolve themselves quickly but, and more commonly, she might work at a particular drawing off and on over a period of up to 6 months. Typically, she will have as many as six drawings going at any one time, working back and forth between them as the feeling strikes her. She recognizes when one is finished from a sense of inner peace and satisfaction. Completing one makes her heart feel good. Individual works of her art record issues in her mind that have been resolved. She enjoys surrounding herself with them for that reason.

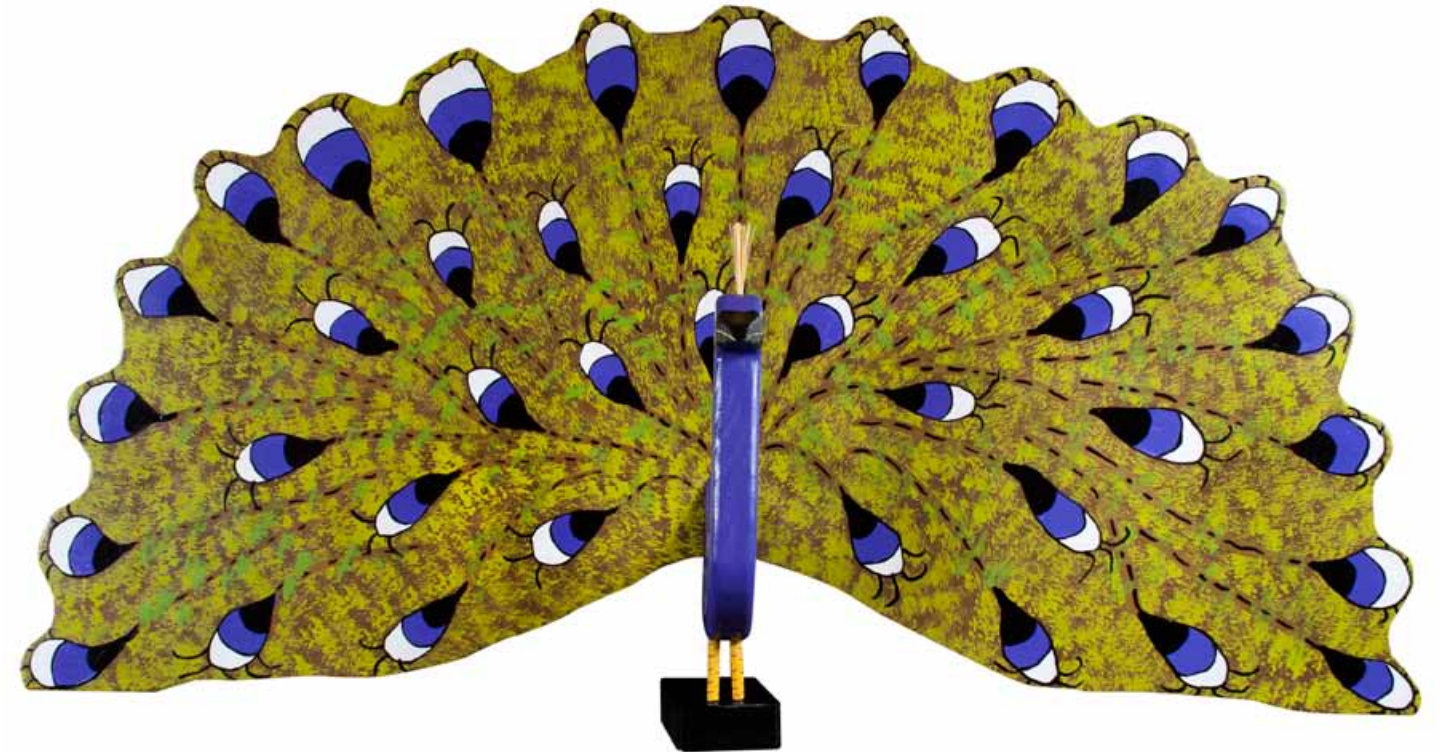


IN FLIGHT OUT OF THE ASHES, Barbara Burton, 2011, Oil paint, black and red ballpoint pens & white china marker, 28 x 22, \$700

Jo Ann Butts (b. 1950) recalls fashioning whistles and bows and arrows as a child, and making dolls and painting on jewelry boxes while living in Ohio. Tired of working on an assembly line, she and her husband returned to Kentucky where she began attending local art gatherings. Minnie Adkins first encouraged her to try her hand at art, and purchased the first piece she carved. Adkins then helped Jo Ann begin selling her work. Sometimes, images just come to mind. Jo Ann paints and also produces wood carvings. Color selection, when painting her carvings sometimes presents the biggest challenge, but she works through it and feels a sense of accomplishment as the colors emerge. Painting murals, however, provides the deepest sense of satisfaction. To date, her most ambitious mural project required working off scaffolding to portray the four seasons on a section of the highway bridge above Laurel Gorge. Sometimes ideas for her work just seem to appear in her imagination, but however much she plans the work, the full image often reveals itself in the process of the work, frequently at variance from her original conception of it. She says she values the experience of seeing those images develop, as though they make themselves through her hand. In her estimation, it is her Appalachian roots that represent the single most powerful influence in her work. For Jo Ann, it is the creative process and the positive response of other people that offer the deepest sense of fulfillment for her involvement in this work.



AN ART-FILLED HEART, Jo Ann Butts, 2012, Acrylics on canvas, 48 x 34, \$500



PEACOCK, Jo Ann Butts, 2012, Painted wood, 25 x 46 x 11, \$300



PLANE COUPLE, Brent Collinworth, 2012, Wood, iron, bicycle lamp & paint, 13½ x 34 x 4½, \$150

Brent Collinworth (b. 1943) retired in 1995 after thirty-one years as a special education teacher in Kentucky public schools. In the early 1990s he started making what others would later call “art,” beginning with carved wooden fishing lures and paintings of people fishing. The lures led him to carve five foot long fish that were rigged to be hung on a wall, reminiscent of early American store signs. Selling them at flea markets, he also made purchases there, gradually accumulating a wide selection of these otherwise discarded objects. To these he added items such as driftwood, gathered from nearby creeks, creating an eclectic collection of junk that serves as potential art making materials. Then, he began to combine them to form novel new assemblages, which he would then paint, initially with scenes related to fishing. Gradually, his subject matter broadened beyond fish and became more diverse as he developed a painterly style that can best be described as surrealistic. Today, this is how he works. Sometimes he buys old paintings, whites them out and paints them afresh, avoiding the expense of purchasing canvas and new frames. Beginning with “I’m just in this for the money,” his account of the creative process tells a different story. Asked how he works, he says that he often starts out with a specific idea, but his imagination kicks in as he is working. The subject evolves as the work progresses so he doesn’t really know what he will end up with until he’s done. Pressed, he says that he makes art to entertain himself and to get people to wonder what it is. He finds this process fascinating. He says, “I like to tinker with it see how it turns out. I like it a lot when I’m making it and when people are looking at it. If I weren’t doing this I’d be reading a lot or fishing. The best thing I ever made is the next one I’m going to work on!”

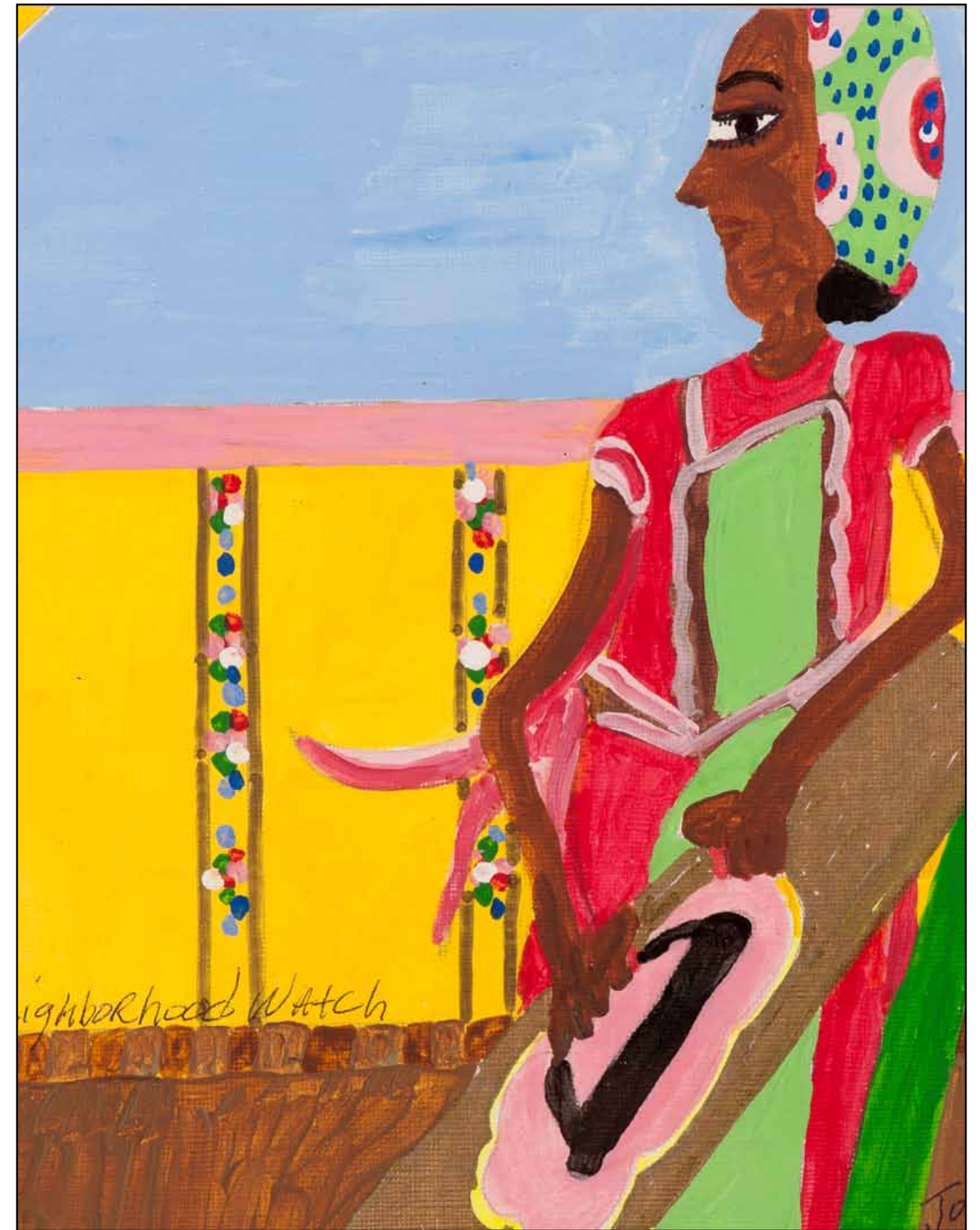


AMERICAN DALI, Brent Collinworth, 2012, Wood, metal & paint, 15½ x 27½ x 3½, \$150

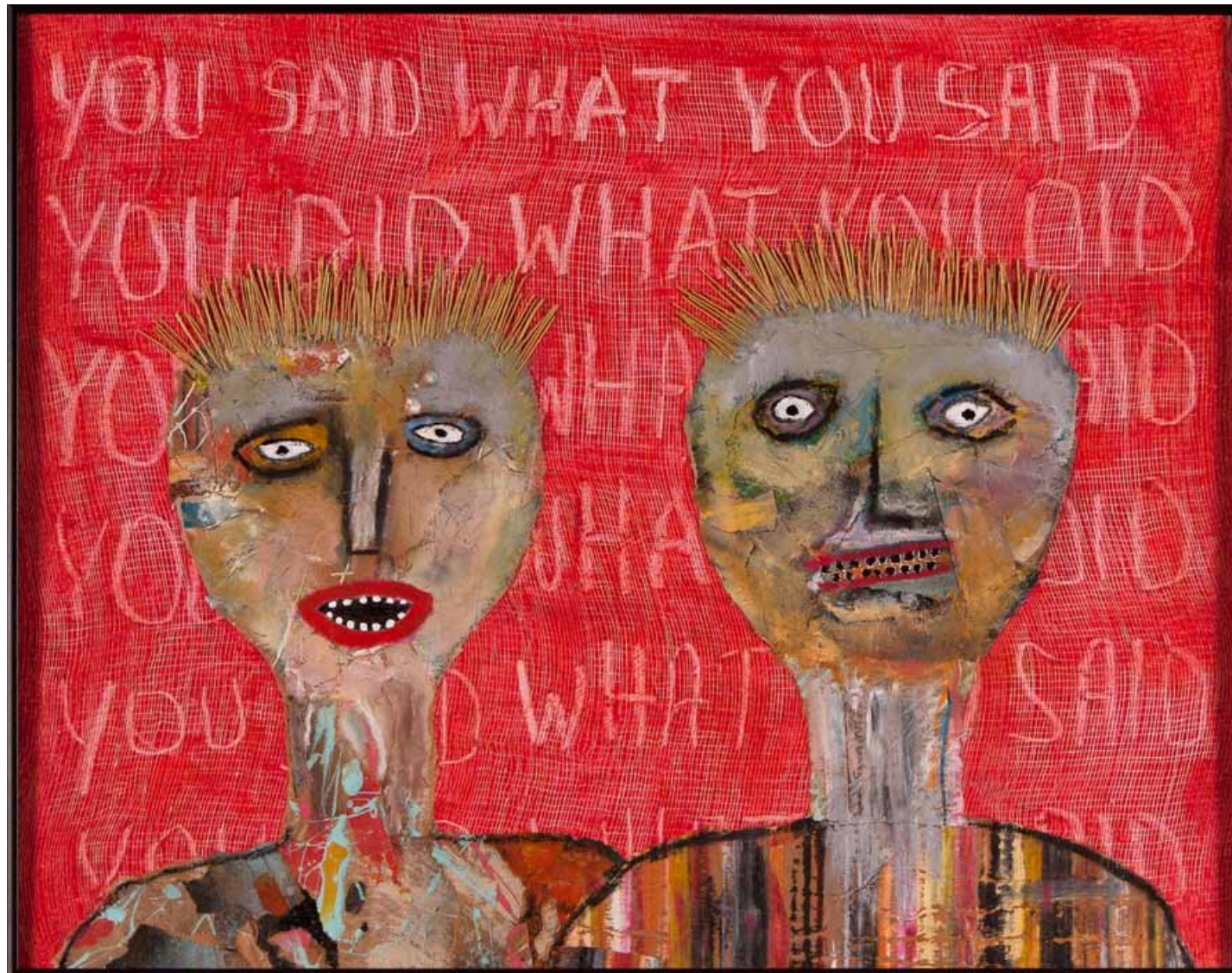
Joan Dance (b. 1940) was born, grew up and still lives in Paducah. She left school in the early 1950s, after the 7th grade, because her parents could afford neither books nor school lunches. At home she helped raise her younger sister, then married at the age of 16 and raised five children of her own. In mid-life, Joan began writing about the events that had shaped her life, as a creative outlet that enabled her to think about and work through the challenges she had faced and the problems that confronting her at the time. In the early 1990s, on an impulse, she started to draw. She began with very controlled, linear renderings of church buildings. With the insertion of human figures into subsequent drawings, her work began to evolve until it took on an entirely different feeling. Eventually, there emerged in her work a very open, loose, and self-confident style. Since the mid-1990s, she has worked as an artist in her own right, using pencil, watercolors, markers and acrylics, sometimes utilizing all of those media in a single work. Her work offers intimate insight into the neighborhood and culture in which Joan has lived during her life. In a sense, her art provides candid snapshots of a community largely invisible from those who live outside the bounds of its rich, complex, and often-embattled cultural environment. Joan's life and work were spotlighted in *Kentucky Women: Two Centuries of Indomitable Spirit and Vision*, authored by Eugenia K. Potter and published by Big Tree Press in 1997. Still working regularly in her seventies, Dance's work can be found in selected galleries around Kentucky.



WHY DON'T YOU LOVE ME LIKE YOU USED TO DO?, Joan Dance, 2012, Mixed media, 9½ x 7½, \$356



NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH, Joan Dance, 2012, Mixed media, 9½ x 7½, \$356



**YOU SAID WHAT YOU SAID YOU DID WHAT YOU DID, Tad DeSanto, 2012,
Paint-splattered cardboard, house paint, oil stick, marker, acrylic & cheese cloth on Masonite, 23½ x 18¼, \$800**

Tad DeSanto (b. 1947) developed an interest in art when he was in his twenties. At one point he served an apprenticeship in stained glass, but involvement in art remained a pastime. Nevertheless, he was increasingly drawn to make art and continued to create things over the years. Friends who visited and saw his work consistently responded with encouragement. When he retired, he began seriously exploring his ideas and experimenting with an expanding variety of visual media. In the mid-2000s, he decided to show some of his work at “Good Folk Fest” in Louisville, where he lives. To his surprise, response to his work once again was very positive, and he sold several pieces that weekend. Since then, he has spent much more of his time focused on art. DeSanto employs unusual combinations of materials to achieve striking, often tongue-in-cheek images that reflect on life and politics. “I generally work with oil sticks. I usually ‘paint’ with my fingers on Masonite, sometimes on wood,” he said. “I also like to make collages.” His work is driven by observation and personal experience. He stated, “I love creating juxtapositions that offer multiple interpretations.” His work frequently incorporates written inscriptions. However, unlike some self-styled, outsider artists who use and reuse certain slogans in their work, DeSanto’s text is specific to the work of art. As a result, his mixed media art contains some of the most innovative imagery to be found in this field today. Tad’s work is shown regularly at various galleries in Louisville.



YOU WERE THE ONE, Tad DeSanto, 2012, Paint-splattered cardboard, oil stick, marker, cheese cloth & house paint on Masonite, 19½ x 257/8, \$800

Marvin Francis (b. 1960) grew up in western Kentucky. As a prison inmate, he discovered art. Since the range of materials for three dimensional work is limited and access to tools is minimal, he discovered papier maché as the most logical medium for his work. Experimenting with a variety of ingredients, he formulated his own mix, and his work is created almost entirely from that concoction. His work typically portrays scenes of life in prison, and its impact on the inmate. Francis has unquestionably broken new ground in his use of papier maché, manipulating it with unprecedented expertise, and most first time viewers of his work respond with disbelief. The intricacy and degree of detail in his sculptures are, indeed, almost unbelievable. Typically depicting a solitary inmate figure, his prison dioramas are usually surrounded by thin wooden dowels mounted vertically, imbedded top and bottom in horizontal wooden plaques that invoke the image of a barred prison cell. The detail in these cells—rolls of toilet paper, pin-up photos, UK Wildcat insignia, tins of boot polish, etc.—often suggest the inmate’s aspiration to forge some sense of normalcy within what is clearly an abnormal environment. The two Marvin Francis works in this exhibition, represent a departure. One, with no cell, features three inmates and comments darkly on the ingredients in prison food. The other, by far the artist’s most complex work to date, shows two stories of a cell block with a guard and five separate inmates in individual, barred cells. To their credit, prison authorities have, for the most part, been accommodating within the limits of reason, enabling Francis to explore himself through his work as an artist.

BEAKS ‘N FEET, Marvin Francis, 2009, Papier maché, 9¾ x 8½ x 5½, \$3,500



PRISON BLUES: OUTSIDE LOOKING IN, Marvin Francis, 2011, Papier maché, wood and paint, 25 x 24 x 11, NFS



**CRUCIFIXION CANE, Tim Lewis, 1999,
Painted wood, 38 x 11 x 8, \$500**



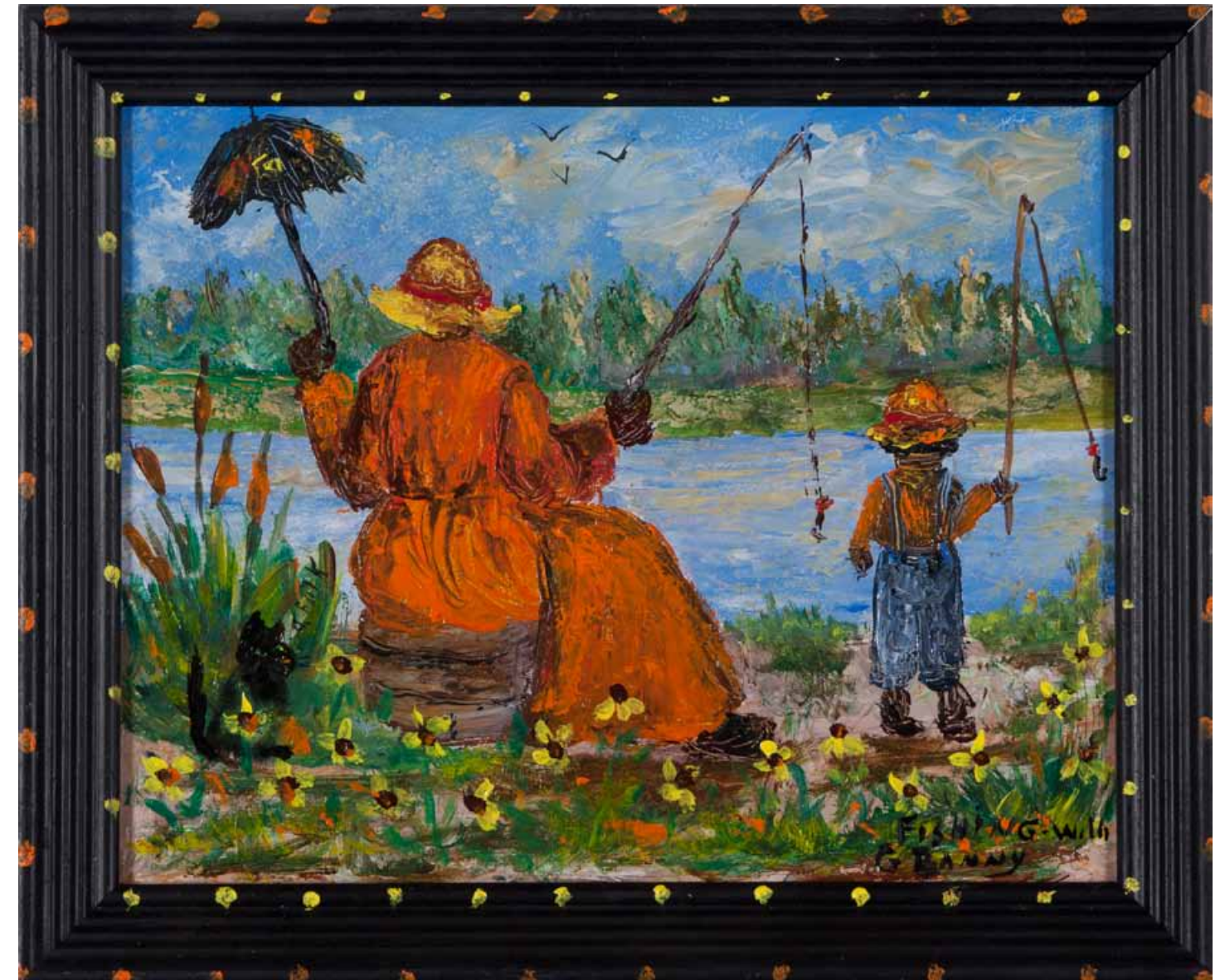
**FOUR HORSEMEN, Tim Lewis, 2012,
Painted Sassafras wood,
19 x 21 x 7½ (each), \$2,000**

Tim Lewis (b. 1952) lives in Isonville, close to where he was born. Before he found art, he served six years in the army, worked as a coal truck driver and at a variety of other jobs. He lived at different times in California, Alaska, Louisiana, Texas, Georgia and New Jersey. In 1987, in the aftermath of a dangerous truck wreck, he began looking for other means of supporting himself. It was at this time that he began to make highly decorative walking sticks. Lewis' sticks were fashioned from slender young trees that were cut below ground level retaining parts of the root structure. Upended, he trimmed unwanted root ends to create the image he saw there—animals, mythic creatures, icons of pop culture, etc. Finished in bright gloss paint, these sticks rapidly gained the attention of collectors nationwide. Tim then taught himself how to carve stone, gradually developing an immediately identifiable, unique style of work. In 1996 he was commissioned by Coca Cola to produce an outdoor installation in Atlanta, which he executed in concrete in celebration of the Atlanta Olympics. Tim is best known for his works in stone. In 2009, KFAC hosted a traveling retrospective exhibition that included over 25 of Lewis' carved stone sculptures. The exhibition was developed and toured by the Customs House Museum & Cultural center in Clarksville, Tennessee. Still working in the more difficult (and physically taxing) stone, he recently began carving stand-alone sculptures out of wood. Tim Lewis is widely known in folk art circles and his work is included in several museum and numerous private collections. In 2007 he was the recipient of the annual Distinguished Artist Award from the Folk Art Society of America.



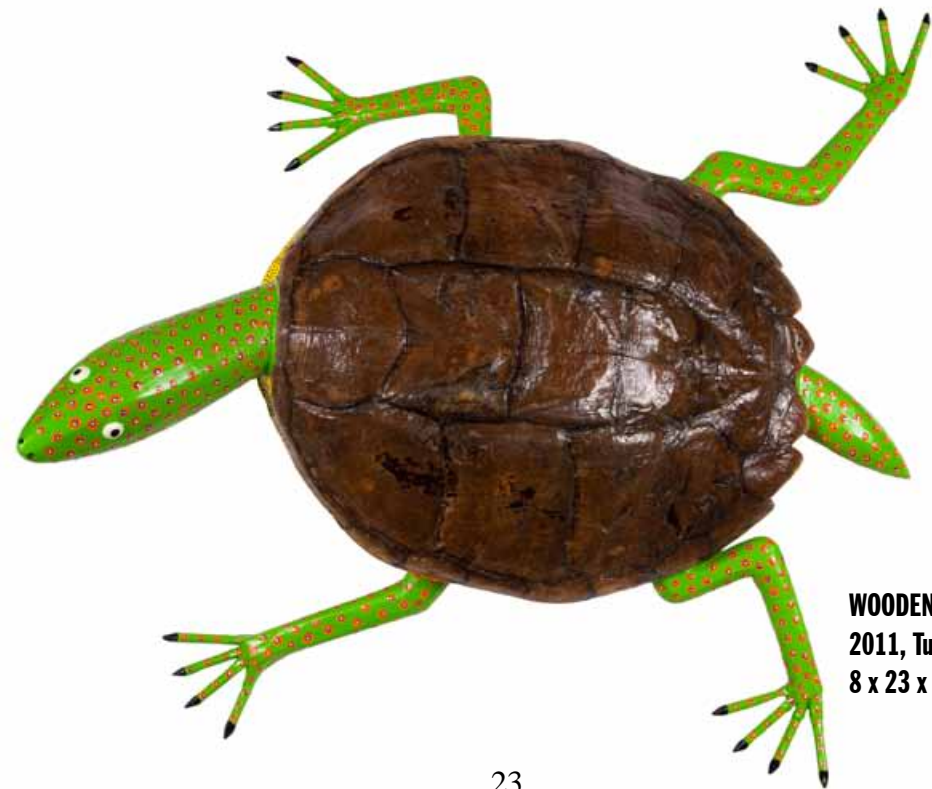
DOWN AT THE RIVER, Janice Miller, 2012, Acrylics, 19 x 21 x 7½, \$399

Janice Miller (b. 1939) has been fascinated by art since grade school and began working with watercolors around the time she was in eighth grade. Materials were scarce when she was young, but she was given some oil paints in the 1950s and has been painting ever since. Having purchased a farm in the 1990s, she eventually downsized her farming activities so she could focus more fully on her art. Most of her time is now dedicated to painting, and her work continues to evolve. Many of her works are ‘memory’ paintings depicting imagined rural scenes from an earlier time. She maintains that the artist is best served by not becoming too dependent on the approval or endorsement of others who see the work. “If I had listened to what some people said about my paintings, and taken their comments to heart,” she said recently, “I might have given up painting a long time ago... Don’t get me wrong,” she said, “I still like the strokes [affirmation of her work through the approval of other people] but the act of creating art is the real gift artists derive from making their art.” Her paintings are exhibited widely in Kentucky and can be found in a number of galleries around the state.



FISHING WITH GRANNY, Janice Miller, 2012, Acrylics, 13 x 16, \$299

Lonnie & Twyla Money (b. 1949 & 1952) are husband and wife and work together to produce some of the most recognizable works of contemporary Kentucky folk art. Lonnie watched his uncle whittling when he was a boy. Two generations earlier, his great grandfather, a traditionally trained wood carver, had arrived full of hope from Switzerland in the late 1800s to find out quickly that his skills were not in demand here, and he ended up working on the railroad and in a coal mine. However inspired, Lonnie recalls wanting to make things as far back as he can remember. After jobs in Louisville and locally, in Laurel County, Money turned full time to farming, raising and harvesting a 50,000 pound crop of tobacco. But he also continued carving, and was increasingly successful selling his work. When he began taking money from his carving endeavor to support operation of the farm, he stopped farming so he could work on his art full time. Encouraged to do so by a major customer in the early 1980s, he also began painting his carvings but was never comfortable with that part of the work. By 1985, as a market for his carvings continued to increase, Lonnie convinced Twyla to try her hand at painting them. She took naturally to the painting and soon developed the signature style and use of colors that are now easily recognized and widely known. Twyla's painting became an essential aspect of the work, which represents a rare, husband-and-wife artistic collaboration. The Moneys also work with gourds, and while they produce multiple versions of certain pieces, Lonnie still finds inspiration in the materials themselves. The shape of a particular gourd might suggest a chicken; a particular piece of wood might conjure another creature in Lonnie's mind. While they have been highly successful, Lonnie says "It's in the work and doing it that I get my real satisfaction." The art is an adventure for Twyla as well. I can get lost in the painting," she said recently. "It's very peaceful, and I can easily lose track of time."



WOODEN TURTLE, Lonnie & Twyla Money, 2011, Turtle shell, wood & paint, 8 x 23 x 22, \$250



WOODPECKER FAMILY MIRROR, Lonnie & Twyla Money, 2011, Wood, glass & paint, 32 x 33, \$800

POSTCARD FROM FLORIDA, Robert Morgan, 2012, Mixed media, 35½ x 28½ x 8, \$1,700



Robert Morgan (b. 1950) realized that he was an artist during his teens. Growing up in Lexington, he spent time with artist and mentor Henry Faulkner and was active in the alternative art scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He traveled extensively over the next decade, gravitating towards cutting edge artists and underground cultures wherever he landed. But it was the impact of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s that finally galvanized his focus as a serious artist. Since that time, his support for the victims of HIV has been a sustaining personal commitment. AIDS sufferers were sometimes reviled by members of their families who turn their back on infected relatives as though they no longer exist. There is an intriguing parallel between those rejected by society and the basic materials used by Morgan from which he assembles his sculpture. Most of his work is made from “found objects,” gathered items that had previously been thrown away or rejected as trash by other people. His initial series of pieces were centered around old radio sets on which he assembled a dazzling, shrine-like array of other trinkets and trash, building a body of work titled “Daughter of Cain,” (exhibited at KFAC in 1995) as a form of memorial to his deceased mother. In the 20 years that have since elapsed, Morgan has been extremely productive. Overall, his work incorporates religious myth and symbolism from other cultures reconstituted and combined to present a new and optimistic vision. He is especially influenced by the culture of Haiti where he spent an extended period of time visiting and collaborating with local artists, in the mid-1990s on the proceeds of an award for individual artists from the Kentucky Arts Council. Borrowing unashamedly from religious or non-religious iconography of cultures worldwide, and appropriating whatever fits his need, he created a unique, new, and fluid iconography. Beginning with Patti Playpal© dolls, Radio Flyer© horses or large plastic chickens, many recent works have been reinvented as defiant, warlike creatures ready for battle on the positive side of an ongoing war between the forces of good and evil. Morgan has no doubt they will succeed. “Any other outcome is simply unacceptable,” he said. One of the most prolific living artists, his work is widely exhibited and collected. In 2011, KFAC presented *Robert Morgan, The Age of Discovery*, a solo exhibition of his work.



AMAZONIA, Robert Morgan, 2009, Mixed media, 12½ x 23 x 23, \$1,700

Bruce New (b. 1970) made things as far back as his teens. As an adult, he fell and was injured while working in construction. His injuries required a lengthy recuperation, and it was then that he became engrossed in art. Books from the local library inspired him to experiment with style and media, exploring art from different periods and from cultures around the world. All this helped develop his technical skills and a broad visual vocabulary. His present style emerged while creating a lot of art, from repetition in his own work. "I don't know where it's going," he said. "I do what I do and the work just comes out. I don't understand exactly how, or why." It is a compulsive but a compulsion that helps realize his own identity. The numbers present in many of his collages refer back to the year of his birth, his wedding anniversary, or the birth year of wife, Robin, who he claims as his "supreme muse." Artists are at their best, he contends, when they are lost in the process of making art. He does not claim to understand why he does what he does artistically, but says the work just comes out in the process. "I don't really think about what I'm doing when I'm working; the art seems to create itself," he said. You must be open and then you will continue to discover yourself as you go along." His work has been shown in New York, Chicago, and elsewhere. Issue #77 of *Raw Vision* (published in the UK, and probably the most significant journal on contemporary self-taught art) will include a feature article on Bruce and the front cover illustration is of one of his collages.



A LESSON IN FLIGHT, Bruce New, 2012, Pen/collage on paper, 20½ x 32½, \$750



THE MUSE PREPARES THE STARS FOR FLIGHT, Bruce New, 2012, Pen/collage on paper, 33½ x 21¾, \$750



LET'S CALL IT A NIGHT, Janice Harding Owens, 2012, Acrylics, 25 x 25, \$1,200

Janice Harding Owens (1952) has been painting for over thirty years. For several years she helped out by painting wooden items made by her craftsman husband, Ron. Her painting was noticed by John Irvin, a Vice President at Lexington's Central Bank, who provided her with her first actual canvas. Irvin returned and purchased that painting and repeated the process to accumulate enough works to stage her first exhibition at Central Bank Gallery. Sales of her work increased and she began to get private and corporate commissions. Most of her work can best be described as memory paintings, although she periodically breaks out of this to paint fantasy, nursery rhymes, or the iconic Uncle Sam astride a strutting rooster. Art enabled her to work at home as her seven children grew up, even if, she jokes, her absorption in painting led them sometimes to refer to her as "the wicked witch of the west." She admits to being "temperamental" on occasion when she is at work. Perseverance has paid off for Janice who now has paintings in numerous public, corporate and private collections. Her work apparently connects with the image of Kentucky held in the minds of many of its inhabitants. Brown-Forman, and Woodford Reserve in particular, have taken a special interest in her work over the years, and one of her paintings hangs, she has been told, in the Washington DC office of Kentucky's senior Senator, Mitch McConnell. The subjects, she says, come from her head, but she does not draw or outline the composition onto the canvas before she begins painting. "I start at the top of a canvas and work on down," she says, "but I never know what will end up there. It just flows. I'm a bit compulsive... I beat them to death until they come together!"



SUMMERTIME, Janice Harding Owens, 2012, Acrylics, 26 x 26, \$1,200



UNTITLED, Jim Gary Phillips, 2012, Paint on wood, 27 X 21½, NFS



Usury Beast, Jim Gary Phillips, 2012, Paint on wood, 27 x 21½, NFS

Jim Gary Phillips (b. 1952) began painting in the late 1990s. At the suggestion of their son who had met Minnie Adkins while working in her area, Phillips and his wife stopped in to visit her on their way home from a vacation on the North Carolina coast. Adkins was out of town but they visited Tim Lewis, living next door. At his suggestion they later stopped at Kentucky Folk Art Center on their way back to I-64. He says they returned home and forgot all about it, but what he saw must have triggered something inside of him. Soon afterwards, while casually exploring a new Wal-Mart store near home, he happened on the crafts department and impulsively purchased some brushes and a few containers of paint. He started painting on pieces of lumber, but hid his work when visitors came to his home. His daughter, however, took photos and showed them to a friend. At their urging, he later brought his own work to KFAC in Morehead. Admired by the museum's staff, his paintings went on display in the museum store where they were soon sold. In the years that have passed since then, Phillips work has attracted ever-wider attention. His work has been featured in a number of exhibitions and is carried by galleries in several states. While biblical themes are prominent in his paintings, he firmly dismisses any suggestion that his art represents a spiritual calling. He likes to paint what he wants, so he no longer takes commissions, which he says reduces his work to the level of a factory. The pleasure and excitement of discovery that comes in the course of actually making the art far outweigh in importance the money he makes or the recognition others have for his work. "I just enjoy doing it," he says. "It's just something I gotta do."

Thaddeus Pinkney (b. 1952) worked in theater and in social service jobs from his early twenties. In 1995 he came to know walking stick-makers William Miller, 1962-2008, and Rick Bryant, b. 1963, while they were all three involved in Art In The Park projects in Louisville. That encounter and the friendships that grew out of it led Pinkney to begin drawing. Working with children at the Metro Arts Center, he pressed them to express themselves in their art, but his students challenged him, "We want to see how you express yourself." By 2004, Pinkney was producing drawings deserving of a gallery showing. In 2005, Kentucky Folk Art Center acquired several of his drawing for the museum's permanent collection. Now, while he still occasionally works in theater, his main focus is on art. Beginning with scenes or characters from urban life, his range of subject matter expanded over the next few years but usually come from his imagination. Sometimes he turns to his art simply out of a compulsion to do something, rarely knowing what will develop in the process. In terms of economics and lifestyle, Thad lives by choice on the fringes of society, in a neglected, hardscrabble section of Louisville. That choice offers him insights into that part of the community mostly out of sight to most of the population. As a result, his subject matter is sometimes "dark," but he generally leans towards making a positive statement through his work, which provides him with a sense of peace. "You have to be OK with who you are," he says. "Most importantly, if I could do anything in life I'd make sure my family and friends are safe and happy. I believe that we affect everyone we encounter. But you're supposed to put out positive energy. Ultimately, that's about all you can do." Thad sells his work at a variety of shows around the area and is now owned by collectors scattered around the US.



TEARS 2, THE WORLD AS WE SEE IT: MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL, Thad Pinkney, 2012, Soft pastel on mat board, 20 x 32, \$300



TEARS 1, THE WORLD AS WE SEE IT: URBAN, Thad Pinkney, 2012, Soft pastel on mat board, 20 x 32, \$300

Monica Pipia (b. 1958) grew up in the greater Chicago area. Her mother was an opera singer, and she was surrounded by creative, eccentric people as a child. Growing up, Monica spent a lot of time around horses, qualifying for the playoff in world competition in the open jumper division at the age of sixteen. After a career in sales, she settled in Lexington where she began to experiment with art. Drawing and photography and dreams she had of painting, led her to begin working on canvas around 1996. "I like painting because I'm always surprised with how it will turn out," she says. She likes to improvise, saying, "Something changes in the process. I can take those developments, reuse them, and build on them. A lot of the answers to my questions are in my work." Painting leads her, she believes, to a better understanding of the truth, and of reality. A work of art emerges, in her view, when she can "[f]ind that edge. Until then, it's just a painting." Despite their dominance in her work, her paintings are not really about the horse. Her close involvement with the horse made it the logical metaphor, and they have taught her, she says, in ways that clearly inform her art. Pipia says, "You can't exert your will on a horse. You have to work with it. I've always been in love and the whole sense of freedom that comes from communion with an animal." The horse represents many other things in her art and opens doors for a broader, dynamic dialogue about life. Monica's paintings are shown regularly in exhibitions around the Bluegrass and are now included in many collections in the region.



RIDING ACADEMY, Monica Pipia, 2012, Mixed acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72, \$5,000



FAMILY TREE, Monica Pipia, Mixed acrylic on canvas, 36 x 24, \$1,200



DANCING, Willie Rascoe, 2011,
Wood, copper-epoxy inlay, paint, stain & varnish,
63 x 12 x 4, NFS

SAD, Willie Rascoe, 1992,
Wood stain & varnish, 43 x 14 x 3, NFS



Willie Rascoe (b. 1950) lives and works in Hopkinsville in his native Christian County. Art was not part of his background, but in 1974 he began creating abstracted objects. That soon led him to make more elaborate pieces that incorporated objects found in nature. A skilled carpenter and builder, he continues to do some of that work along with making his art, and the two activities, he says, provide a good balance in his life. His materials, gathered around his hometown, have included driftwood, bone, shells, and turtle claws, sometimes augmented with copper. Typically he uses very little paint but finishes many of his sculptures with stain and varnish. His mind is relaxed when he is doing this work, and he likens the experience to being in a trance. He may start out with an idea, but often as not the end result is unexpected and comes from working on the particular piece. Though he has never sought the limelight, over the years his work has found its way into several collections, but he is often reluctant to part with it. However, his work has generated many requests for him to work with children as a visiting artist in area schools, where he urges students to push themselves to explore, recognize and take advantage of their own, unique talents. Talking about his work he waxes philosophical. His art has taught him “to be more patient with things that I work on and...with things in everyday life.” For his sculpture Willie Rascoe has received a key to the City of Lexington, and he was recently honored as a 2012 award recipient from the Boston-based Tanne Foundation. Tanne Foundation awards “recognize outstanding achievement, and are an expression of gratitude to artists for their passion and commitment to their work.”

Eileen Stockham (b. 1964) recalls drawing as a youngster but did not pursue art. Instead, she earned a law degree and practiced for four years before giving up her job as a lawyer to stay at home after her first child was born. She was deeply affected by the death of her grandfather and began painting because, she now acknowledges, she felt compelled to do as a way of working through the grief. Using acrylics, some of her paintings are heavily patterned. As it was from the start, her art continues to serve as a vehicle for working through problems or challenges that she faces. When certain issues dominate her attention, she can find peace by painting her way through those thoughts. "I'm really happy when I paint, she says. "Often, I feel compelled." But as most artists will agree, that is not always possible. She explains, "I may feel compelled, but I have to be in the right frame of mind." Her work contains private, personal metaphors. This is "not necessarily what others see when looking at it. Other people see what they see. This may not be what I had in mind, but it is what it is." She certainly enjoys the validation that comes from the approval of others but often has difficulty parting with her paintings, having found herself dwelling on work that she sold or gave away long after they were gone. Eileen shows her work locally in and around Somerset where she lives, and several of her work have been featured in recent exhibitions at Kentucky Folk Art Center.



MY WOODS, Eileen Stockham, 2012, Acrylics in canvas and wood, 31 x 37, \$1,000

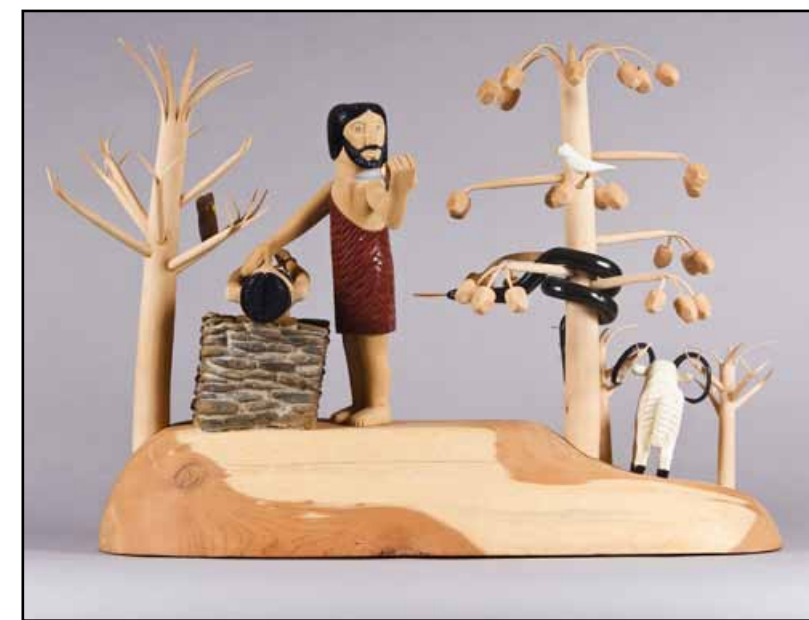


THE WOODS, Eileen Stockham, 2012, Acrylics in canvas and wood, 31 x 31, \$1,000



**PORTRAIT OF EDGAR TOLSON, Donny Tolson,
2012, Wood & paint, 23½ x 5½ x 9, NFS**

Donny Tolson (b. 1958) began carving as a boy, making himself wooden toys to play with. He also spent much time hanging out on the fringes of the action observing the work of his father, Kentucky folk art legend, Edgar Tolson (1904-1984). As a youngster, Donny recalls helping Edgar, “blocking out” pieces to wood for him, which meant that Edgar could get more quickly to the actual work of carving. Donny began producing his own wood carvings when he was twenty-one, often working alongside Edgar during the final five years before Edgar died. A slower, much more meticulous artist, Donny developed his skills as a wood carver. Early on, he worked much in the same vein as Edgar, specializing in portraying certain biblical themes, but as time passed he expanded the range of his subject matter. While his work is reminiscent of his father, Donny soon developed a distinctive style of his own, so that his carvings cannot easily be mistaken for the work done earlier by Edgar. In contrast to Edgar, Donny’s sculptures are much more sensitively detailed, and his figures are more streamlined, often projecting through their physical posture an air of ambiguity, despite the stylized facial expression they all appear to have. While Donny’s identity is inseparably tied to his work as an artist, with his life essentially revolving around that work, he claims still to enjoy the work. “It’s good therapy,” he says. “It takes my mind off worries and concerns.” At times obsessive about it, reinterpreting a number of subjects—Garden of Eden, Abraham and Isaac, Abraham Lincoln—many times over, he continues to broaden his focus, and periodically surprises with unexpected digressions by making painted walking sticks or life-size chain saw carvings of large animals. Donny Tolson’s work has been widely exhibited, in New York and elsewhere, most recently (2010-11) in a traveling exhibition by developed by Kentucky Folk Art Center titled *Red River: The Narrative Works of Edgar Tolson, Carl McKenzie, Earnest Patton and Donny Tolson*. Today, his sculpture is included in the collections of many major museum and private individuals.



ABRAHAM AND ISAAC, Donny Tolson, 2009, Wood & paint, 18½ x 24½ x 9¼, NFS



SOMEONE WHO CARES, LaVon Williams, 2011, Painted wood, wire & bells, 36 x 16¼ x 4, \$1,600

LaVon Van Williams, Jr. (b. 1958) was born in Florida, finished school in Denver, and got a bachelor's degree in sociology at the University of Kentucky where he played basketball (1976-80). A self-described "fifth generation wood carver," LaVon returned to Lexington and has live there since the 1980s. As a boy, he had learned to carve alongside his brother, Dave, who had learned from their great uncle, Luke Wright. Gradually, LaVon developed his own, distinct style of relief carving using a mallet and chisels. His work then expanded to include one-sided panels that were created to be hung on a wall, as well as two-sided, stand-alone figures. Over nearly three decades of working, his carving style has essentially remained consistent. His work focuses on life and culture within the African-American community, drawing heavily on American social history, jazz and blues. Williams' sculptures evoke strong emotion and energetic movement; many images are like candid, intimate snapshots of action frozen in time. Jazz and blues musicians are lost in the ecstasy of the music. Female dancers reach up or and out, crossing new horizons of what is physically possible; dancing couples move together in private embrace. Wall panels depict scenes as disparate as a slave ship, a rent party, or church members united in song. Williams takes liberty with realism, stretching arms and legs in tense compositions that draw in the eye to decode the interrelationships of the various figures. Some panels consist entirely of symbolic faces, hands and feet, fit together like a puzzle, summoning up thoughts of strength in response to oppression. These iconic motifs also appear on free-standing works, adding interest and innuendo to the surfaces of a piano or other vacant spaces. His work has been widely praised for its power and originality. In 2007, LaVon was recognized as artist of the year in the Kentucky Governor's Awards in the Arts. A retrospective exhibition of his work, *LaVon Williams: Rhythm In Relief*, was developed by KFAC and toured museums and galleries in Kentucky and Ohio from 2009 to 2011.



SHE NEEDS ME #3, LOVE WHY DO THEY TAKE YOUR NAME IN VAIN?, LaVon Williams, 2011, Painted wood, 40 x 21 x 5, \$1,200

Text: Adrian Swain
Design: Matt Collinsworth
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