

Roots Group shows in Louisville

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"To scrape the key off and open the box, in a way, is to destroy the piece," he said. "Which is okay. But as long as the box is locked, the owner can project his own stories and ideas into it...I'd love to talk to some people at the opening and let them tell me what's in the boxes for them."

Jean Gray Drake's series of mixed media pieces line a wall of the gallery. Faris says they depict images from her family history and by viewing each one in sequence one can trace her family from grandmother, mother and herself through the images.

Bridget Conn's pieces incorporate organic components such as egg shells, dirt, bones, cinnamon, teabags and bees, blending her interests in science and folklore.

"She's very into concepts of femininity and ideas of women's work," Faris said.

In addition to Faris, Purcell, Drake and Conn, group members Bryan Ghiloni, Nick Nelson and Brandon Tatom also have pieces in the exhibit.

"They think and write and create art about the essential values of rural life," Aikman said. "Their vision is hopeful, unsentimental and clear. They see that art is critical to the survival of rural values."

More on The Group

The group was formed when all of its members lived and attended colleges within about 45 minutes of each other.

Members have lived all over the United States, from New York to Oregon, and have chosen rural Georgia over the metropolitan art centers as a place to focus, develop and promote their work.

Purcell's family has deep roots in Stillmore, a small town of about 300, southeast of Swainsboro.

"None of us really had any roots anywhere," Faris said. "We were so impressed with the place, with his family's connections to the land. We adopted his history and roots and made Swainsboro our headquarters, our home."

They have been exhibiting there, in the small town of Stillmore, for four years.

"When we do a show there, the population doubles," Faris said. "Now that's an impact on a community."

The vision and goals of their group involve providing the traditionally underserved art communities of the rural south through theory-based education, hands-on workshops and locally involved exhibitions.

"As an art advocacy group we hope to demonstrate that art events and exhibitions have the power to create, build and enhance communities," the group writes in its artists' statement on The Firehouse Gallery's website, www.galleryafire.com.

"We hope to build relationships with our community through artist lectures, studio visits, art festivals and exhibitions, field trips and workshops. We believe that by reuniting as a group and giving direct attention to these communities through the before mentioned programs, we can unite the diverse peoples of the rural south whose rich culture and history tells one of the most elaborate and eternal stories common throughout time about human life and struggle: the struggle to protect family, live harmoniously with one's neighbor, learn and grow by self-exploration, and build and sustain a community whose goal is to remember the past, celebrate the present, and look forward to a future full of dreams, promise, and this land's prosperous potential."