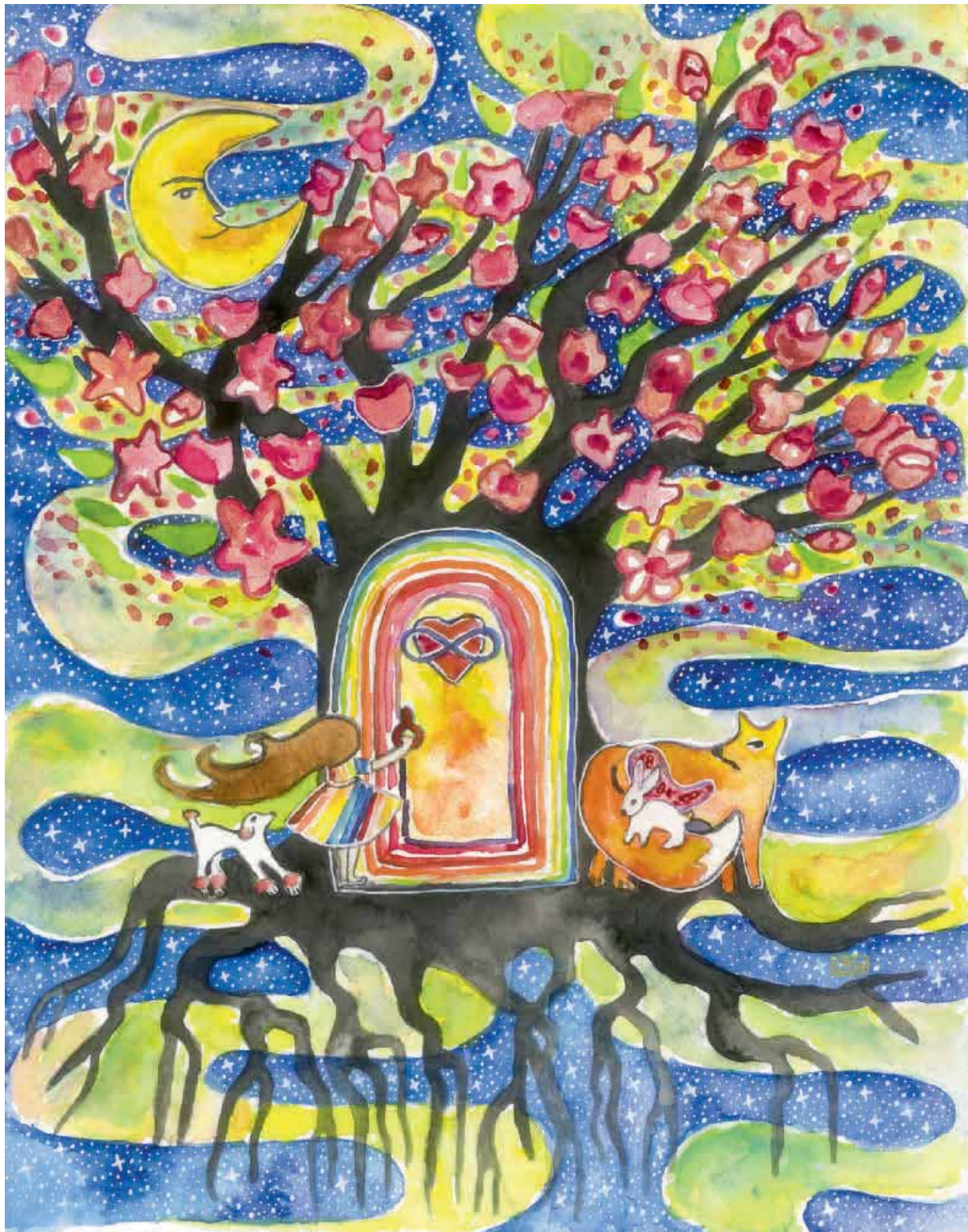


JAS PEAR



Spring 2022

Fall Lines

2022 CALL for SUBMISSIONS

Fall Lines – a literary convergence is a literary journal presented by The Jasper Project in partnership with Richland Library and One Columbia for Arts and History.

Fall Lines will accept submissions of previously unpublished poetry, essays, short fiction, and flash fiction from April 1, 2022 through June 30, 2022. While the editors of Fall Lines hope to attract the work of writers and poets from the Carolinas and the Southeastern US, acceptance of work is not dependent upon residence. Publication in Fall Lines will be determined by a panel of judges and accepted authors (ONLY) will be notified by October 1, 2022, with a publication date in January 2023. Two \$250 cash prizes, sponsored by the Richland Library Friends and Foundation, will be awarded: The Saluda River Prize for Poetry and the Broad River Prize for Prose.

POETRY: Up to five poems may be submitted with each submitted as an individual WORD FILE. Include one cover sheet for up to five poems with the titles of all poems appearing on the single cover sheet. Submit to FallLines@JasperProject.org with the word POETRY in the subject line.

PROSE: Up to five prose entries may be submitted with each submitted as an individual WORD FILE. Include one cover sheet for up to five prose submissions with the titles of all five submissions appearing on the single cover sheet. Submit to FallLines@JasperProject.org with the word PROSE in the subject line.

COVER SHEET should include your name, the titles of ALL your submissions, your email address, and mailing address. Authors' names should not appear on the submission. Do NOT send bios.

All entries should be titled. No simultaneous submissions. There is no fee to enter, but submissions that fail to follow the above instructions will be disqualified without review.





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Dear Friends,

Welcome to the spring 2022 issue of Jasper Magazine!

As we come to you this spring, the world is a vastly different place than it was in September 2011 when we launched the very first issue of Jasper Magazine. Of course, change happens all the time—it’s usually something to celebrate given that growth means change and, without growth we are stagnant and moribund. The opposite of growth is death.

This issue of Jasper finds healthy accounts of growth throughout its pages.

Kristine Hartvigsen writes about author and founding Jasper staff member, Michael Miller. Mike’s new novel, *The Hip Shot*, came out from Koehler Books last November. For a writer, nothing represents change and growth more than a new book, and we’re here to congratulate Mike and encourage all his Midlands friends and neighbors to slip a copy of *The Hip Shot* into their back pocket or beach bag this summer.

Visual artist Tyrone Geter has changed his address, at least temporarily. Read Will South’s interview with Geter to learn what the ever-virtuosic artist is up to in Gambia.

To *really* get an idea for how much a human can change over a 10-year period of time, we caught up with Michael Krajewski to determine how the last decade has treated him. If you remember, Krajewski was the first ever

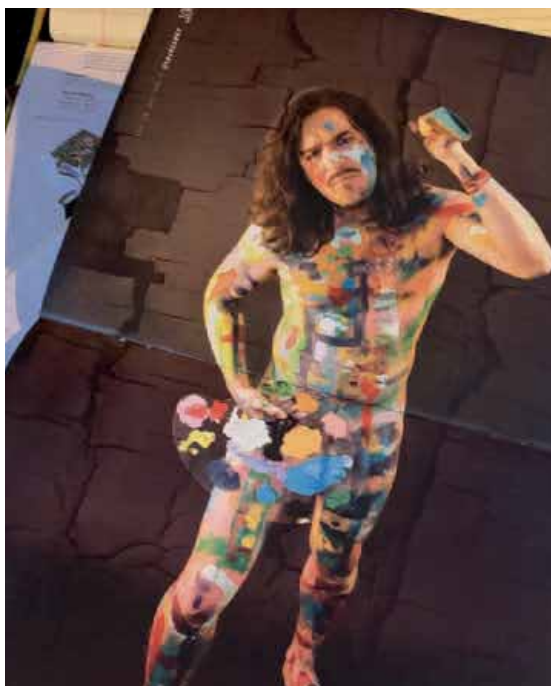
centerfold in Jasper Magazine and, so far, the only subject who has gone for the full Monty in their photo shoot. (See photo below.) Unfortunately, Krajewski opted to remain adorned for his centerfold this time, as he perches on the bar at Kristian Niemi’s Black Rooster restaurant, which Michael is gradually painting for the restaurateur.

But while growth always means change, change doesn’t always mean growth.

Just as we were putting this issue together, we learned of the loss of a valued member of the greater Midlands area arts community, and a founding member of the Jasper Project board of directors, Mary Bentz Gilkerson. Mary died after a brief struggle with cancer. Soon afterward, we tragically learned that we had also lost gallerist and arts advocate, Wim Roefs. Wim’s and Mary’s impacts on our art’s community, and on the lives they touched in our community and beyond, cannot be overestimated. Thank you, Mary and Wim, for all you gave us; we will continue to honor and remember you both into the ages.

Thank you for visiting.

Take care,

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*Jasper// as in Johns, the abstract expressionist, neo-Dadaist artist
 as in Sergeant, the Revolutionary War hero
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The winning entry will score the coveted spot as the Cover Artist for the Fall 2022 issue of Jasper Magazine as well as a \$250 cash prize.

All accepted images will be included in the Draw Jasper Art Show and available for purchase at the artist-designated price, with the artists receiving 75% of the sale price and 25% going toward the publication of Jasper Magazine.

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BY KRISTINE HARTVIGSEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KRISTINE HARTVIGSEN & JAY MATHESON

LINDSAY RADFORD: FINDING JOY IN THE JOURNEY

“Art has always been the raft onto which we climb to save our sanity.” – Dorothea Tanning

Unconcerned with pretense or any stereotypically feigned mystique buoyed by lesser creatives, Columbia artist Lindsay Radford truly wears her heart on her canvases. Every painting reflects moods and emotions from her daily life, like a page from her personal journal. Her work is fantastical, cosmic, surreal, and, in recent years, unabashedly joyful.

“I started meditating a few years ago, and that really

changed my work,” she says. “Actually, it changed me. It made me a more positive person.”

While many of Radford’s techniques and styles have remained consistent over the years, her earlier work often was, quite literally, somewhat darker. She painted with oils and chose darker pigments to release hauntingly surreal images that can only come from the deepest psyche. They weren’t necessarily sad, but their tone was less optimistic, perhaps echoing her confidence level, as she was experimenting, reaching, learning, responding to influences of her contemporaries. She was still discovering her creative self, still evolving.

Originally from Montgomery, Alabama, Radford’s first artistic medium — kindled during her teen years attending a magnet art school — was film photography.

“It was a very cool experience. We would make cameras out of an oatmeal box with a pinhole in it,” she recalls. “I loved it. I wanted to be a photographer. I like the dark room. I like the hands-on. ... As time went by, digital cameras came out, and they have gotten better, but there was magic in waiting to see what you got” while the film was being developed.

When she was 10 years old, Radford’s father was in a severe motorcycle accident. She thinks that may have fueled her interest in photography. “He looked like a totally different person,” she says. “I think that is when I started wanting to take pictures of everything. I didn’t want to forget anything. I don’t have a photographic memory, so I like to take and keep pictures.”

As she navigated her way into painting while working on a studio arts degree at Columbia College, Radford was drawn to surrealists such as Leonora Carrington, Dorothea Tanning, and Frida Kahlo. All of these women were known for their employment of themes ranging from alchemy, illusion, and fantasy to introspection, rebirth, and the female form.

Radford embraces these themes and, like Kahlo, periodically produces otherworldly self-portraits. In Radford’s self-portraits, the artist appears almost as if she is under water or floating, her long dark hair suspended in meandering coils. Like Kahlo, Radford inserts autobiographical miens into her work, doing so openly and transparently. Her late poodle, Smooch, was a whimsical white presence in her canvases for years, and she added another poodle, Ziggy, soon after. Ziggy herself happily serves as a canvas of sorts, as she regularly is groomed in rainbow colors, endearing herself to everyone she meets.

Another recurring image in Radford’s paintings is an upright bass, which resides in her eclectically appointed living room. “I took lessons a long time ago but stopped playing,” she says. “I have painted it more than I have played it.”

Carrington often depicted creatures — real and imaginary — in her paintings, including horses, dogs, and hyenas. Radford also uses creatures, including horses, giraffes, and elephants. All seem to have ethereally elongated legs that seem never-ending. Radford claims there is nothing mysterious or symbolic in this Dali-esque visual choice.

“I was only trying things out, and it just kind of worked,” she says. “I don’t know what’s going to happen. I just stay with it until the end. That is part of the magic, not

knowing what you are going to get. To plan something out just seems so boring to me. The fun is in what you discover in the process.”

Radford describes her style as a mixture of surrealism and expressionism. She especially likes layering of color and imagery in both photography and painting. “I really like the German expressionists,” she says. “At Columbia College, we did a lot with that. I like the mystery of surrealism and expressionism.”

She gravitated from oils toward watercolors several years ago, in part as a practical matter. She works full time at a job that, on the surface, would seem the complete antithesis of art. Instead of a paint-splattered apron and favored paintbrush, Radford dons a lab coat and latex gloves for her day job as a histotechnologist in a dermatology lab.

“When people have tissue surgically removed, that tissue is sent to the histotechnologist. In a lab, we process it for pathology to aid diagnosis,” Radford explains. “There is an art to it. The slides go through a series of stains. The tissue is kind of like the film negative, and the slide is the





“I want to put a positive message out there through my art,” she says. “I want to generate something more happy.”



Radford pictured with artist colleague Gina Langston Brewer and a mural they created together.

positive. You can see the connection of all the cells. It almost looks like aerial photography.”

Radford’s latest watercolors are decidedly celestial in mood and feel. They are bright, colorful, endearing, sentimental, mysterious, playful, and increasingly popular among local art lovers.

“I am kind of obsessed with stars. Astrology is interesting to me. I don’t know how much of astrology is really true, but I like narratives and stories,” she says. “I can remember someone’s astrological sign because there is a picture associated with it in my mind.” Radford was born on the cusp of Virgo and Libra.

Asked if she had any art-related items on her bucket list, Radford said she would like possibly to collaborate with another artist on a mural. Just two weeks later, she got that opportunity with fellow artist Gina Langston Brewer. The two were commissioned to paint a mural inside a newly opened private bar, WE’s, in West Columbia. They were given carte blanche for the project and approached it completely free of agenda.

“That was a lot of fun. I think we worked well together,” Radford says. “It was totally spontaneous. We didn’t plan

anything. We just kind of flowed. Gina started with a face, and I started adding to it. ... We did it fast, in about four hours.”

At age 39, with her alabaster skin and glossy dark hair, Radford exudes a much younger presence.

“I still haven’t grown up. I think it’s what being an artist is like, never fully growing up,” she says. “Sometimes I think I have too many ideas. I work a regular job. It’s hard for me sometimes to stay grounded. I think every artist struggles with that stuff. I’m bad at doing laundry and keeping a clean house. I am really just wanting to paint and create all the time.”

As the pandemic winds down and life begins to feel more normal, Radford wants to celebrate our collective emergence from what, for many, was a dark and lonely place.

“I want to put a positive message out there through my art,” she says. “I want to generate something more happy.”

First-Time Novelist Mike Miller Journeys From Rock-n-Roll to Whodunnit



by Kristine Hartvigsen
Photography courtesy of Mike Miller

Sometimes, the unlikeliest of circumstances can put us on the path to big places. Who knows. It may have been Michael L. Miller's lush '80s, MTV-esque locks that first put him on the path toward writing success. The way he tells it, when a manager at The State newspaper was looking for a music scene reporter for the paper's entertainment section, he glanced around the newsroom and zeroed on a long-haired rookie general assignments reporter and decided, yeah, he's the one.

"I really think it was because of my long hair, but he said, 'That guy gets to cover rock-n-roll,'" Miller says. "I could not have created any better job for myself."

Thus began Miller's prolific career as a journalist and eventual book author. His talent, experience, and grasp of the human condition are evident in Miller's debut novel, *The Hip Shot*, a swiftly unfolding murder mystery told through the exploits of four

longtime friends and other colorful characters of a small Southern town. A mystery buff, Miller came into the genre honestly enough.

"What started it for me, and a lot of people who aspire to be writers, is that I was a reader as a kid. I got hooked on the Hardy Boys books," he says. "I have an entire wall of crime novels and stuff like that."

Born in Columbia and raised in Dillon, Miller covered the local music beat for The State from 1988 until 2003. During that time, he wrote about familiar local bands like Danielle Howle and the Tantrums, Cravin Melon, Jebel, Treadmill Trackstar, and Isabelle's Gift. Another band he came to know very well was Hootie and the Blowfish, which began to rise in national popularity as a touring band in the early 1990s. Miller knew the guys well by this point and had earned their confidence, so much so that they invited him to shadow them on the road. It was

unbelievable access and a singular experience that provided fodder for Miller's 1997 book, *Hootie! How the Blowfish Put Pop Back into Pop Rock*, published by Summerhouse Press.

"Writing the *Hootie* book, that was a daunting task," Miller says, "but once I held it in my hand, I said, OK, I can do this."

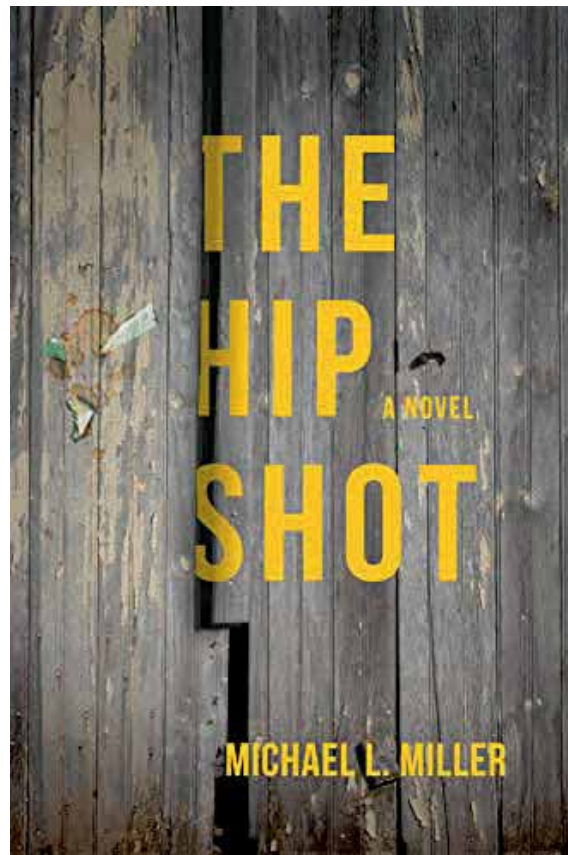
The following year, Miller began to feel a hint of burnout and decided to take a creative writing course at the University of South Carolina, where he had earned his master's in journalism. Author Bob Lamb was the instructor.

"He really liked a short story I wrote for his class, titled 'House of Horrors,'" Miller explains. Lamb felt the characters were both quirky and authentic. In fact, the small town itself was a character all on its own. "He suggested that I write more stories connected to the same small town. That eventually led to the publication of *Lonesome Pines*" — Miller's 2008 collection of short stories published by Red Letter Press.

In addition to 'House of Horrors,' *Lonesome Pines* included a story titled 'The Lamp,' with which Miller won the SC Fiction Project the previous year. "Winning the Fiction Project gave me a lot of confidence," he says.

Miller started writing *The Hip Shot* in the fall of 2019 and completed the bulk of it during the COVID lockdown in 2020. Readers may think they recognize some of the locales and people in the book, but that's because of Miller's mastery of setting, character, and authentic dialogue. A local watering hole, some golf buddies, and a prominent recording studio in Columbia, as well as the many folks Miller has known over the years, certainly inspired some of the scenes and characters in the novel, but they are 100 percent fiction.

As one might expect, with a recording studio flavoring the book so prominently, Miller in real life does write and perform what he calls "story songs."



“I have been around music a lot and played music but never thought of pursuing a career in it,” he says. “I am just a very avid amateur.” Miller does admit that the recording studio in *The Hip Shot* was modeled after the Jam Room. “My experience at the Jam Room and knowing people like Jay Matheson certainly did inform me on how a studio works and how the recording process is done. I tried to give a realistic depiction of a recording studio in a small town. My experiences at the Jam Room were instrumental in doing this.”

Many songs tell stories, and often country music comes to mind, but Miller feels that music produced under the “country” moniker tend to be formulaic. He prefers more astutely rendered songwriting along the lines of Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Bob Dylan, and John Prine.

“I love story songs and songwriters who tell stories,” he says. “For example, James McMurtry, author Larry McMurtry’s son. He writes very literary songs that make you stop and listen.”

As he worked on his *Hip Shot* manuscript, Miller did not envision actually, well, publishing it. Encouragement from a number of respected friends changed his mind.

“I had a blast writing the book,” he says. “I wasn’t trying to write the Great American Novel. I just thought my friends would get a kick out of it. That alone was the end goal for me at the time.”

Miller wrote the first draft from beginning to end without showing it to anyone. He kept every sentence, every chapter to himself. It took a lot of inner prodding to actually share the manuscript with a few discerning writer friends.

“I gave Tim Conroy a copy of the first draft. He said it was good,” Miller recalls. “Then Rob Barge (longtime friend and *Lonesome Pines* illustrator) and his wife, Tricia, also read it and liked it. I trusted them to be honest enough to tell me if it was any good. At Tim’s suggestion, Carla Damron also read the first draft. She gave me a lot of feedback, two pages of notes. She was very honest and helpful. ... They all gave me confidence to start a second draft.”

A seasoned journalist and editor well known to writers in South Carolina, Aida Rogers offered advice on submitting the finished manuscript and recommended some publishers.

“I still wasn’t gung-ho about selling my book,” he says. “But I thought why not send it around to a few people. Several weeks went by, and that was it. A publisher in Virginia (Köehler Books) liked it and wanted to do it!”

In a crossover twist that could end up being a stroke of marketing genius, Miller plans to stream some old song recordings he made and present it as the work of “Suburbs of Hysteria,” a fictitious band referenced in the book. That would give fans of the book another way to experience it. The original songs have a rockabilly feel, and Miller provides all the vocals. He sings quite well, his voice reminiscent of Tom Petty or Bob Dylan (think “Red Cadillac and a Black Mustache” for example).

Miller has been doing all he can to publicize the book and suggested that “after” might be the most challenging part.

“Once your book is released — that is when the real work starts, promoting it and trying to sell it. I’ve been writing letters and emails to bookstores and critics,” he says, and it is keeping him pretty busy in his “retirement” years.

That’s not to say Miller isn’t always kicking around new material. Once a writer, always a writer. “I always have a notebook in my backpack. I always end up sitting in a park or bar jotting down stuff in my notebook,” he says. “I really think writers are pack rats.”

With multiple books and a career load of published writing now under his belt, Miller advises younger, unpublished writers not to be deterred but to keep going even when the going gets tough.

“Just keep sending stuff out. Wallpaper your room with rejection slips,” he says. “It requires a lot of discipline and persistence.”

When the dust settles on this book launch, Miller is considering plenty of options for his next project.

“A few people have suggested I write a series with these characters and this small town, possibly a trilogy to bring those characters back again and again.”

MUSIC

10 to Watch

by Kevin Oliver

2022 will be the year many local artists re-emerge onto the scene, some with new music and new goals, others by touring and playing out more. Jasper's local music team, under the direction of music editor Kevin Oliver with hand-offs from former music editor Kyle Petersen and intern Emily Moffitt, has picked out ten Midlands area acts to keep tabs on this year, and it's a diverse list that displays the wide variety of sounds to be found in Columbia.



We start you off with a feature story on Saul Siebert's new passion project, Zion, then turn you on to Katera, who is our latest obsession with her new album *Fear Doesn't Live Here*. (For more on Katera check out our album review in Jasper Online.)

Next up is Tam the Viibe and Desirée Richardson, aka Death Ray Robin, and we finish out the ten with Rex Darling, Space Force, Candy Coffins, Hillmouse, Lang Owen, and Admiral Radio.

Enjoy!

Saul Siebert Remembers Zion

An ambitious, meditative multimedia experience born of collaboration

By Kevin Oliver

When former Boo Hag frontperson Saul Siebert titled his upcoming instrumental project "Zion" it was for both personal and universal reasons: what has become a layered, mantra-like multimedia experiment was first birthed as a nod to his father and his childhood.

"About three years ago I was going through my dad's diaries," Siebert says. "He is a Messianic Jew, and he always referred to his home as 'Zion,' which he thought of as this place where all wrongs are set right, everything becomes whole, and God dwells among the people."

The elder Siebert created his own version of Zion at their home on Bourbon Street in New Orleans, according to Saul.

"Musicians and others were always passing through," he says. "Hobos, derelicts, ragamuffin types; our home was always hospitable to different types of people."

It's remembering that open, welcoming spirit that has allowed Siebert to facilitate the creation of his own "Zion," which has taken shape since that diary session to become a communal effort featuring local musicians



Virginia Russo created the art for *Zion*.

including Sean Thomson, Darren Woodlief, Kevin Brewer, Marshall Brown, and Saul's brother Zach Siebert, with visual components from artist Virginia Russo.

"I went to Zach initially and said "Zach, I really think we should put out this stoner record," Saul says. "EZ Shakes was blowing up, and Boo Hag was touring a lot, and we just couldn't do it. But I kept writing it on my own time."

The structure of "Zion" resembles a classical symphony combined with a theatrical play. There are four "acts", and each has "movements" within them. The concept came first, but the pieces fell into place as the different musicians were added.

“Sean Thomson was the first person I asked, other than Darren, who followed me over from Boo Hag because he’d heard some of what I was doing and wanted in on it,” Seibert says. “I feel like there’s such a community with what’s happening. The process is that when I hand them the skeleton of a track, I tell them ‘this is the composition, the basic bones.’ Sean was the first one to shoot a video and send it back to me and it was him playing the part I sent him on guitar, on sitar and I was losing my mind because my dreams of what this could be were coming true.”

Kevin Brewer (Brandy and the Butcher, Capital City Playboys) came on board as the drummer, with Zach providing textured electric guitar parts throughout and Marshall Brown doing whatever it is he does, according to Seibert.

“Bringing in Marshall was kind of like bringing in the Albert Einstein of music, this mad scientist alien who can reproduce whatever I can suggest, and put it into arrangements that are brilliant, sensitive, and intuitive.”

Based on an early preview of portions of *Zion*, those arrangements range from a My Bloody Valentine wall of guitar noise to the delicate strains of prog rock majesty, sometimes within a single movement, but the layers which build within each track never completely resolve themselves. Instead, they shift and slip in and out of the mix, leaving the listener to decide for themselves what exactly it was that they just heard.

The key catalyst of *Zion* isn’t a musician, however, but visual artist Virginia Russo, whose paintings will be included, both call forth and reflect the aesthetic of the overall work and contribute to the meditative purpose at the same time.

“She’s a brilliant, beautiful human being,” Seibert says of Russo. “Some of *Zion* was birthed from our conversations—I’m very agnostic, adamantly so, and she’s definitely more spiritual, but we get along great, and she understood some of my trials from getting sober and clean. And she has been able to transform our conversations into art.”

The four acts that make up *Zion* are titled “Diaspora,” “Sojourn,” “The Ascent,” and “The Summit.” If that sounds like a journey, or a pilgrimage, it should, according to Seibert’s analysis.

“I think the stages of life are like that, we’re barfed out,

we don’t know our meaning,” He explains. “That’s the diaspora, where we started out. Then we sojourn through life and we’re seeing, feeling, tasting, having all these experiences, and then if you’re fortunate, and cursed enough to be blessed, you realize it’s not enough. I’ve fucked all I can fuck, I’ve shot up all I can shoot up, I’ve drank all I could drink, and then you start to work, that’s the ascent. The crawling to Zion, trying to find this place where there’s peace, where attachments drift away and suffering goes away. And so, the ascent is really a part of the human condition. Finally, there is this rebirth, a place in life where you can get to the summit, in act four.”

If that sounds ambitious, it is. Seibert acknowledges that it has been the collaboration with the other musicians and artists involved driving the process, and he’s almost along for the ride at this point, as eager as any of the participants to see where it all goes.

“I’m just humbled by it,” Seibert says. “As an artist, you have this idea in your head and you think it sounds a particular way, and then you put it out there and everyone involved is bringing in their best. When you work with others like this, you teach each other in a symbiotic, contagious way, but you are also able to guard yourself from pride—it’s important to share, let others have the light.”

Even before it is fully completed, Seibert is thinking about how the final piece will be presented, and how it will be received.

“I think the themes can be meditated on, and the art pieces that Virginia has done for it can serve as relics, or icons, to use in meditation while listening,” he says. “We are going to do a multimedia production, Ash Lennox from Greenville is on board to help with that in a live setting—we’ll use some stationary art and other moving visuals, the whole thing will be a presentation to sit and watch and listen to.”

The live version of *Zion* will be a one- or two-time thing, he reveals.

“We’ll do two nights in Columbia, two in Greenville, and that’s probably going to be it,” Seibert says. “That’s the existential beauty in it, how you can come out and have this spiritual experience with us, where you’ll see and listen to something that will never be repeated. The recordings will be one prism of how you experience *Zion*, but the live thing will be where the good stuff happens, because I see it as mantra, as ritual, something sacred.

Katera

A Powerhouse Recording Artist from Columbia, SC

By Emily Moffitt

A South Carolina native from the Dixiana community on the “fringe of Columbia,” Katera knew from a young age that music was her calling. Now, after the success of notable tunes like “Single” and “No Phone Calls,” 2022 has brought good fortune and renown to this gifted artist via *Fear Doesn’t Live Here*, an album filled with great music and hypnotizing melodies. It already stands out as a frontrunner for some of the best music to come out of Columbia this year.

Jasper asked Katera about her experiences with starting out in the music industry and developing her own style of creating and performing her music.

“My senior year of high school my parents bought me a keyboard with a workstation for Christmas and I began dabbling in production,” Katera says. “That same school year one of the basketball coaches heard me sing the national anthem at one of the games and he linked me with a producer friend of his. I’d say this is when I really started to actively pursue a music career.”

For Katera, an affinity for vocal performance comes easy, especially with her smooth tones and strong handle on the neo-soul gospel genre. “Growing up in church, music has always been around. My parents were in the choir, so I went with them to rehearsals as a child,” she says.

In addition to a church background, Katera also cites Erykah Badu and Brandy as prominent influences in shaping her musical creativity.

The introduction to her album, “Hate Me Now” is a powerfully crafted piece with an entrancing layering of voices and a captivating beat. Soulful anthems about interpersonal connections, love, and learning to embrace a good night staying home and chilling out allow listeners to match her songs to whatever vibe they’re looking for. The album also features high-energy remixes “Superhero” and “In Love With the DJ,” perfect for late-night party playlists.

Among Katera’s goals for 2022 is releasing “visuals to continue to promote my new album and to set up a tour. I’d love to travel performing my music.”

It’s easy to see the self-confidence ooze from the songwriting and sounds of her work, and get the feeling that Katera has the experience and expertise to shine amongst musicians in the world of soul, not just locally, but nationally.

The performing songwriter acknowledges that her roots in Columbia are key in her development as an artist. “There were several people here in Columbia who pushed me as an artist,” Katera says. “Terrence Young, J.T. Smith, and Eli Mboho all fostered my growth along the way, as a guitarist and a performer.”

Katera boasts additional talent across artistic disciplines. She owns her own graphic and web design agency as well as a jewelry line named Blaze & Breezy. Jasper is excited to watch this powerhouse’s career grow as she rides the wave of her newest album.



Boss Babe Time

After a decade in the scene, singer Desirée Richardson steps in the spotlight with her Death Ray Robin solo project

By Kyle Petersen

When “Boss Babe (You Can Have It),” the debut single from Desirée Richardson, aka Death Ray Robin, dropped last year on the 2021 SceneSC Sampler, it somehow felt like a long time coming.

Richardson, who first appeared on the scene as a vocalist in the buzzworthy indie pop act Pandercakes back in 2012, has been a frequent presence on key and vocals for a whole host of acts, including the emo-electro R&B outfit sandcastles, the experimental indie rock group Live Singles, the emo-tinged indie pop of falling off a building and the dynamic live band for rapper FatRat da Czar. She was always the ebullient sidekick, providing a vibrant vocal counterpoint and dynamic presence that suggested she was capable of far more.

According to Richardson, she actually wrote a lot more in her college days but, after returning from a study abroad trip to Korea (she is half-Korean), she suddenly stopped right when she was ramping up her involvement in other bands.

“I just stopped writing songs because I felt like a drama queen,” she recalls. “It wasn’t really about music; it was just interpersonal stuff. But I just stopped expressing myself and kept my feelings inside, instead of writing. I don’t know why I torture myself like that.”

Thankfully, Richardson started writing music again back in 2019, motivated in part, she admits, by a desire to move a bit more into the limelight.

“This is going to sound kind of petty, but I was just annoyed. It was an ‘always a bridesmaid, never the bride’ type thing,” she recalls. “I was always happy to just be a fixture. But after a while, it was—this is kind of embarrassing—I was tired of not being noticed. [And] I think part of that was because I hadn’t expressed myself in so long.”

And with “Boss Babe,” Richardson quickly establishes the extent of her ambition. Psychedelic indie-pop and



avant-R&B collide in a confident production style as the singer delivers coy one-liners indicting office day jobs (“Making copies in clothes that do not fit/Water cooler rumors, spreading shit”).

It’s a full sumptuous sound on record which she warns folks not to expect live. She’s currently playing solo, although a fuller band might happen in the future.

“It’s more a Regina Spektor-type deal, where I play piano. But that’s not how I hear my songs. I want to add some Bjork and Beyonce in there.”

Rap on the Rise

Tam the Viibe, one of Columbia's newly christened Five Deadly Venoms, brings an old school lyricism and new school energy to the game

By Kyle Petersen

Although as an emcee Tam the Viibe is a relatively new name on the scene, dropping EPs and mixtapes over just the last few years, she considers herself more a product of the so-called “golden age of hip-hop.”

“I really came up in the ‘90s, so I’ve really had a chance to watch hip-hop grow,” she says. She name-checks Jay-Z and Nas as formative influences on her lyricism and technical ability, even if her music gives off a more contemporary (Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole) vibe.

But she also dates her creative streak back to childhood. Her mother was a teacher, so Tam was an early reader and avid writer, starting with poetry that eventually evolved into rapping as a high schooler.

Although she cut her first demo tape (“an actual tape,” she laughs) back then, Tam says she really didn’t have enough to write about at the time.

“I intentionally stopped rapping and writing for a while,” she says, noting that this happened right around her move to Columbia in 2006. “I wanted to make sure I was saying something. Being from Pawleys Island and being so young, I wanted to make sure I had some substance.”

Since 2017 or so, she’s been back at it, to increasingly promising results. 2021’s *Hiii Life, Vol. 2* showcased her increasingly masterful flow and animating sense of identity. A song like “Better Days,” the single and video she’s currently pushing, crystallizes her creative endeavors, combining hardened bars with a warm, organic sense of soulfulness that filters Lauryn Hill through the lens of Kendrick Lamar’s spirituality and beat selection.

Despite dropping in late October of last year, it’s not her most recent project. Challenged by Milah, one of her fellow “Five Deadly Venoms” and a similarly refreshing and alternative figure on the local scene, to write some love/heartbreak songs since her catalog was bereft of them, Tam quickly recorded four songs



in early 2022 for her Valentine’s Day drop of the *With Love* EP.

As for the “Venoms,” Tam says it was a name given to a quintet of female artists (Tam the Viibe, Milah, Kenya T, Toni Esther, and Lady T) by Black Nerd Mafia empresario Kwasi Brown, and that they had all met at a previous show organized by Markos Hurtt and New Brookland Tavern.

“[All of] these folks are part of our tribe,” she says. “We mesh well, we’re all our individual selves. We all do different things. But because we’re confident in who we are individually, we can stand next to each other and root for each other too.”

Diving into the Perfect Storm:

WOW Productions Releases Its First Series

by **Stephanie Allen**

Photos by **Bree Burchfield**

An amateur cooking show, “YouTube University,” and an itch to be creative. These three things turned into over a decade of local playwriting, filmmaking and now, a new series that takes a unique spin on the classic whodunnit.

This story itself is one of three parts or, rather, one of three women, each of whom have their own personal contributions to the Columbia film and performing arts scene. Tamara Finkbeiner had always had a desire to write. Jostera Baxter had always had an interest in entertainment. Tangie Beaty had the foundation in local theatre. All they needed was an opportunity.

Finkbeiner, who is originally from Barbados in a military family, is a self-proclaimed technical person. She wants to know how things work. The type of person to read every single name in the movie credits. “Not that I know these people,” Finkbeiner laughs, “just like what are the different parts of the movie—what makes it work? What makes it happen?”



Jostera Baxter



Tamara Finkbeiner



Screen shot from *Secrets in Plain Sight*

Baxter, also a product of a military family, traveled and performed in a gospel group when she was younger. “I’m singing on the stage and in church with all these people that, to me, sound just as good as anybody on the radio,” Baxter says. “But they’re all still here in Columbia.”

With time, she understood that a lack of talent management and business knowledge was preventing local artists from advancing outside of the city.

Through WOW and One7One, the three women get to be that missing opportunity. While they prioritize creating quality productions, they also ensure that they develop spaces for learning. Knowing that One7One started as an amateur venture, Finkbeiner emphasized the importance of fashioning an environment where it is safe to fail.

Before working together, Baxter and Finkbeiner met early on in their young adulthood. Finkbeiner was a first-year student in college and had come back to visit, and Baxter was dating her brother at the time. The pair both ended up at Columbia College. “Man, that’s been a long time,” Finkbeiner says, laughing at their twenty-year-long friendship.

Eventually, right around 2010, a friend of theirs wanted to do a cooking show. Baxter had just bought a camera and the two offered to film it in Finkbeiner’s kitchen. “We had to learn how to edit super-fast,” Finkbeiner says, mentioning a reliance on YouTube to get a grasp on unfamiliar tools.

As the pair learned on the fly, a realization started to strike: “We could do this,” Finkbeiner says. The address of the house they filmed this first piece in was one seven one.

So, just like that, One7One Productions informally began.

At the premier of the cooking show, they met the missing member of their soon to be trio, Tangie Beaty. Beaty is the CEO of WOW Productions, the first minority-owned blackbox theatre in the state.

Tangie Beaty is a woman with a vision.

Beaty hoped that Finkbeiner and Baxter could film a stage play she was involved with. Hesitant because of their lack of experience, the two turned down the offer. With enough persuasion (coupled with trust) from Beaty, they changed their minds.

This solidified their decision to make films as a business. With the cooking show and stage play under their belt, One7One began doing trailers, cast interviews, and even a short film based on a poem Finkbeiner had written. The play that they had been so worried about filming ended up getting national distribution. The positive feedback fueled their drive to keep up the work. Baxter and Finkbeiner also began working more closely with WOW Productions, with Finkbeiner working in managing and marketing, and Baxter serving as the productions manager.

Beaty has a heart for the arts and community—the person to pull people together. She writes most of the plays that are created at WOW and — is an executive producer for shows.

“She fosters an environment for growth,” Finkbeiner says. “Especially with new actors— she will whip them into shape.” By focusing on the quality of production, they aim to make shows that are not simply good onstage but are also memorable enough to get the actors hired on for other outside projects.

Beaty started out in Connecticut and began WOW Productions in 2005, with a focus on writing plays

that “rebuild family values,” according to Finkbeiner. Finkbeiner believes that putting a story onstage can touch people in a different way than just conversation. They want the characters to be relatable and so push their actors to exhibit this realness.

“Your character represents someone in the audience,” Finkbeiner says. The actors’ portrayals need to resonate with those audience members. While the stories they tell focus on urban African American life, they want to prioritize creating stories that people of all backgrounds can identify with.

“It’s not necessarily like we want to put a highlight on Black life— this is our life.” Baxter says. “We just want to write stories so well and communicate it with our voice... we want it to be authentic. We want it to show all the spectrum. Because, as African Americans, there’s a lot to us.”

Baxter emphasized that their productions aren’t designed to cater to a limited audience. They believe their stories are relatable to everyone, even though they are the ones directing the narrative.

By the end of 2019 going into 2020, the group was working on a stage play called *Secrets in Plain Sight*. After COVID-19 hit, the play was postponed several times.

“From the first time I saw the original show, I was like... this feels like a TV show,” Finkbeiner says. “The stage is great, but I think it could be expanded so much further on screen.”

Since they couldn’t get people into the theatre, they decided to pivot, and pivot quickly. They began developing the script for television.

Baxter mentioned that the group had toyed with the idea of doing a film series before— the timing of COVID and *Secrets* made for “the perfect storm.”

The process of recrafting the play into something that made sense on screen was a tedious one. They dove in headfirst which, though less than ideal, gave them a push out of their comfort zone. LeTasha Robinson and Donna Johnson engaged in adapting the script, and Beaty and Arischa Conner Frierson worked in casting.

This adaptation was a months-long project in and of itself. Because of their prioritization of quality, they are firmly committed to not publishing just “anything.”

After the first reading, film started in December of 2020. As cases started to rise, however, they had to put things on hold. After a winding timeline, filming resumed and completed in January and February of 2021. Editing began and the episodes were put together.

After this first rough cut, the team reviewed the footage together to analyze the project and soon realized that some things didn’t quite work.

That summer, several scenes were reshot.

It was daunting finding locations to shoot during the pandemic, especially without any prior experience in TV. At one point, they were in desperate need of a house to film at. The space had to fit the characters and had to scream upper class. “We couldn’t just put them anywhere— it was a home.” Finkbeiner says.

They had scheduled a date to film the scenes, but the location kept eluding them. Everything they looked at fell through, and Finkbeiner was starting to feel the weight of the production. One night, right before falling asleep, Finkbeiner typed up a message to an Airbnb about



Screen shot from *Secrets in Plain Sight*



Screen shot from *Secrets in Plain Sight*

filming at their location. While she felt strongly in herself, she didn't expect anything to happen. By the end of the following day, they had the location secured.

This first season certainly had a learning curve. The combination of reworking the script, figuring out how to produce a series, and filming during the pandemic made for a chaotic several months. Additionally, everyone involved had other jobs and commitments outside of *Secrets in Plain Sight*. They worked at a “breakneck pace”—a speed that they now recognize as unsustainable. “It was grueling,” Finkbeiner says, “I know that’s maybe how it is in Hollywood and different places, but they are on different budgets and a different time-frame and it’s a whole different type of thing.”

While the piece was originally meant to be a limited series, another season is on the way. Given the amount of content from the original play, they anticipate a total of around four seasons. However, expect episodes to get longer. While the first episode is the longest (and most viewed), all of the following episodes run just longer than 20 minutes. At four episodes total the season is a quick binge.

After receiving feedback from the viewing of the first season, the women plan to give viewers the extra time per episode that they were craving. All of these edits fit into the initiative-taking learning process that the show has been thus far— they’re still adjusting their approach. As the series works with a limited crew, the women each wear several different hats in the production process. While the three share the title of executive producer, Finkbeiner and Beaty are writers on the show and Baxter serves as editor. Beaty and Baxter also take a hands-on role on set, acting as boom operators.

When the film was screened at a red-carpet release at Harbison theatre, the audience was shocked to learn that it was all filmed locally. “They were like, ‘I’ve never seen

Columbia look that good,’” Baxter says, mentioning their surprise at how metropolitan the city looked in the show. The show itself is meant to keep you on the edge of your seat. Per its title, the series is about secrets that start catching up with the characters. According to Finkbeiner, if you think you know something, you’re probably wrong. Baxter described it as a murder mystery, a “fresh take on a whodunnit.”

Because the show has been paid for out of pocket thus far, a goal for the future is to get grants and look for alternative forms of funding. *Secrets in Plain Sight* is currently available on YouTube and WOW Productions TV, but the women aspire of wider distribution. Finkbeiner in particular wants to work to get the show on a streaming platform.

In the meantime, the women will still be producing local stage plays and, hopefully, more shows and films. With *Secrets* up and running, Finkbeiner noted that many of their other plays could have the potential to be converted to the big or small screen.

In addition to their personal creative work, they plan to continue to use their resources to build up and support local and amateur artists. Even when working with new talent, the women are able to guide and trust fellow creatives. As COVID-19 restrictions lift and people come out more, they expect more stage plays.

WOW also offers acting classes, workshops, and doing anything else they can to open they can do to open the door to budding artists. “WOW is a family,” Baxter says. So, after two decades of friendship between Finkbeiner and Baxter, over 10 years with WOW Productions, and a launch into television film, the women only have more goals ahead of them.

“We’re not gonna stop. This is just getting started.”

Quincy Pugh Pair and for the Ages



Veterans Day Parade: I, Too, Sing America

Paints for All of Us

By Cindi Boiter

In an effort to support the plethora of neighborhood art crawls this spring, Jasper invited artists who would be showing their work to get their talents out in front of the festivals by answering a few questions and sharing images of their art with us. We published these completed questionnaires in the online version of Jasper Magazine which you can find at the Jasper Project website, JasperProject.org. We were able to enjoy dozens of names and images that were relatively new to us, but one especially stood out.

Quincy Pugh first attracted us with his vivid, super-saturated colors. Then we looked at his subject matter and noticed that not only did it invite the viewer in, but it offered both brave and evocative images. At first, we thought them political, but then we realized that, even in the hyper-partisan environment we currently create and occupy, we couldn't necessarily determine which side of the aisle the artist might inhabit.

We suspected there was more to Mr. Quincy Pugh than brilliant colors and intriguing figures—and we were right.

A native of Augusta, GA, Pugh has lived in Columbia, SC since 1988 when he came to the city to complete his Master of Librarianship at U of SC. Pugh says he became interested in art in high school and “reluctantly declared it a major fairly late after starting college” at Augusta University. He received his Bachelor of Studio Arts there in 1982.

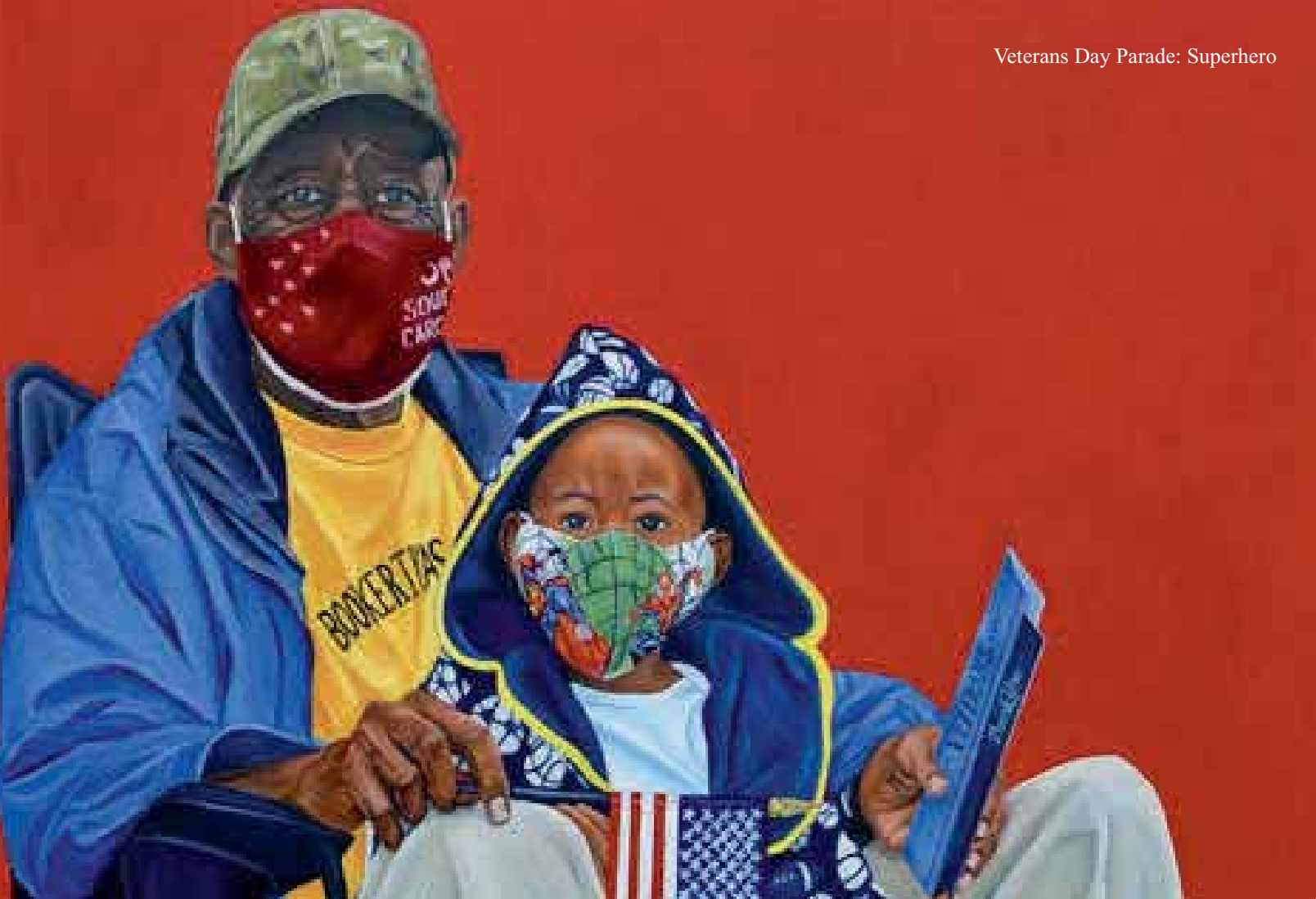
After a career at Richland Library where he was the Film and Sound Manager until 2018, Pugh retired and, since then, has been pursuing art full-time from his studio in Blythewood.

If you visit Pugh's website (quincypugh.com) the first thing you'll notice is an extensive quote by spiritualist Marianne Williamson from her Course in Miracles that reads, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? ...” And so on. In so many ways, this quote exemplifies the mission behind Pugh's art. And his life.

“I just want to do what I can do to the best of my abilities, hopefully, that will turn into something sometime that is meaningful and transformative,” Pugh says humbly.

To that end, among Pugh's paintings are a series of stylized portraits of civil rights leaders and icons inspired by their mug shots. Fred Hampton, Martin Luther King, Jr., Bayard Rustin, John Lewis, and, most profoundly, one titled *The Exoneration of George Stinney, Jr.* in which the subject, a 14-year-old Black





child who, in 1944, was unjustly tried and executed for the murder of two white girls in Alcolu, SC is depicted with a crown of thorns and a golden halo around his young head. Stinney's conviction was vacated as an unfair trial in 2014.

Equally as evocative is Pugh's series, in progress, of Veteran's Day Parade portraits which depict Black and white veterans of various social classes and political intentions attending parades and united by their records of service to the country. Among the attributes depicted in the portraits are both confederate flags and Black Lives Matter placards, but the stories that Pugh's subjects bring to the paintings are best depicted in the faces and postures of the subjects themselves.

Pugh, whose husband is a veteran of several tours of active duty, attributes the impetus for this series to his own proclivities as "an observer. I look at the people, these common people who are often overlooked and I want them to be seen," the artist says. "African Americans have served this country throughout history and their service still isn't appreciated on the home front," he continues. "My goal is to make you notice and see our common humanity."

In a recent painting titled Superhero, a young child sits comfortably in the sling seat of his grandfather's chair as they attend a Veteran's Day parade. An aide-mémoire of the Coronavirus pandemic, the child wears a Spiderman mask, but it is clear in the painting that the real superhero is the grandfather, sporting a Booker T. Washington High School t-shirt and a red mask with the words "South Carolina" emblazed across the front.



The Three Graces



Veterans Day Parade: Buffalo Soldier
Motorcycle Club



“Lightening” by Tyrone Geter

Gambia Dispatch: *Tyrone Geter in Africa*

By Will South

After a distinguished career teaching, Tyrone Geter has entered his so-called retirement like an Olympian determined to clear every remaining hurdle. His major 2016 exhibition at the Columbia Museum of Art presented an artist at the top of his game with images that displayed an enviable amount of skill and that conveyed a clear message: In our ongoing collective struggle for social equality, let's not be fooled by the classic art of the misdirect where our attention is subtly turned toward one thing (a hoodie, for example) so it does not notice another (like systemic oppression). This was the first hurdle—a serious Museum exhibition with a catalogue, promotional budget, and the opportunity to talk directly to the community, which he did with relentless energy.

Another hurdle has been to take both his art and his teaching skill to a place that has long called to him: Africa.

Tyrone first went to Africa in 1980 with his wife, a Hausa woman from the Northern Region of Nigeria, where both of his daughters were born. He returned to Boston in 1987 before moving to Columbia, SC, and Benedict College in 1999 where he taught for twenty years. But he would again feel the desire to return, only in a more permanent way. This meant a studio and a home he would have to build from the ground up.

In Gambia, that home/studio is now nearly complete, and the artist is there. I reached Tyrone by phone and discussed the next hurdles.

WS: Tyrone! Hey. Thanks for agreeing to give me some time and share what's happening with you.

TG: Not a problem, always a pleasure.

WS: Most of your fans in Columbia will be surprised to know you now have an African headquarters. Tell us about the studio and the motivation behind it.

TG: When I left Africa with my family in 1987, my wife, Hauwa, and I fully intended to return to Nigeria. With her passing, Africa seemed further and further away. Then in 2004, I had a serious struggle with my health—

heart disease. After a bypass or three in January 2021, lung cancer paid me a visit. I came to realize that my mortality was coming ever closer. During cancer surgery, my daughter, Jamila, was fortunately coming home to Columbia from China to have her baby. While there, she was offered a teaching position in Gambia. This rekindled my desire to fulfill my wife's dream of returning home. What helped set the stage for the move was money—I sold just enough work at that time to make it possible. We planned a three story 7,500 square foot building.

WS: That is incredible. So, lots of room. You've talked about teaching art in Gambia. Will your studio be involved?

TG: I am not sure just yet about teaching. Not sure I still can in the traditional sense. I have met with some local artists, and they are interested in interacting. It will probably be associated with the studio. We have a pretty big roof that we want to develop. This is where we will hold classes if we go this way. My youngest, Hafizah, who is a writer living in New York, is in discussion with us about developing a program that would foster interaction with people of color in the States and Gambia. There are no formal art studio programs in the visual arts in Gambia. There is only one college and one university and neither one teaches visual arts.

WS: Will there be opportunities for Columbia artists to use it and experience Gambia?

TG: The studio still needs the painting and electrical work to be set up. It is wired and all fixtures and lights and fans are installed but the electric meter is yet to be installed. No monthly payments with automatic deductions here. You pay as you use it. Need some power go to the company and buy what you want or can afford.

We purposefully built the second floor to act as a rental that will sooner or later be open to people from abroad to do research on the art and culture of the area. Artists will be offered a discount if they spend a portion of one day per week working with a young artist. If I am not teaching personally, there will be teaching by others while I am making art.

WS: You are known in South Carolina and beyond for your large-scale drawings of powerful African American people. Overnight, seems to me, you have branched out at the ripe (can I say that?) age of 77 into digital artmaking, something that would scare even some younger artists. What got you into that? How did you adapt? What are

the advantages/disadvantages? Handful of Lightning is an eye-catcher. What does it say?

TG: I had done some digital paintings at Benedict after being pushed over and over again by Sanford Greene, a former student. It never took with me at the time. More involved in studio work. I guess I had a somewhat purist attitude, thinking the use of computers was mechanical and without feeling. I have since maybe started to understand myself a bit better. The feelings are all in me. Digital art is just a contemporary tool that is no more than what you make of it. And so too is traditional art.

Here in Gambia, my art has become focused on women (as usual). Without women in this culture (or any culture for that matter), it would go under—they do everything. They have such enormous power inside, and that is what Lightning is about. From nature, a woman grabs the power of lightning, and that power is inside her to use. And now, the younger women especially are fighting for their future and that future is all about nature and how we treat it. The environment is at the heart of the series I'm now working on, as understood through the special role of women. To create honest and meaningful work, I'm learning everything about the culture I can, to not misrepresent anything, to understand. I talk to people and listen.

WS: On a personal note, how is life in Gambia compared to America? Is there room in your heart for both?

TG: I grew to love Africa from my college days at Ohio University. The feeling only increased after falling very hard for one of Her daughters. I have always wanted to live and work somewhere on Her soil. I love the people, the land, the weather, the food, the inspiration, and so on forever. I found a peace here that is impossible for me to attain in the United States.

WS: And, lastly, what is a goal of yours yet to be achieved?

TG: No clue. I am just trying to deal with the last goal—coming home to Africa. I guess having the time to create a new body of work, including digital paintings, getting to know my kids and grands again might just be enough for now. No point in tempting fate by being too greedy.

WS: Some of us think you've done a great job at giving back, and we look forward to the new work.

TG: I do my best. Peace t



Michael Krajewski

10 years later and counting

By Cindi Boiter
Photos: Brad Martin

JASPER: Michael Krajewski, you were the first ever centerfold in Jasper Magazine. What do you remember about shooting that centerfold?

KRAJEWSKI: I remember feeling vulnerable, physically, and emotionally. I wanted a small, closed set. I mean, except for the paint on my body... that was it. Excitement and raw nerves, but in the best way. It felt real, it felt new, it felt important. I remember, the shoot was almost over, and Cindi encouraged me to lean into some real emotion. What was hidden underneath. That's when the centerfold shot happened, with me coming at the camera with my paintbrush.

JASPER: It's been more than 10 years now since we first wrote about you and your art. Can you share with us what have been the biggest changes in you and your work since then?

KRAJEWSKI: Back then I was working with found materials, cheaper stuff, cardboard, wood scraps, experimental shit and I was working everywhere, friends' houses, kitchen tables, borrowed spaces... I was just creating anywhere and with anything I could get my hands on. I felt restless. My work felt frantic and dark at times. In the back of mind, I was questioning if there was somewhere else I needed to be.

But Columbia is home now, I feel that. I feel myself putting down roots. I have a home studio now where I do a lot of my work, but I'm also looking forward to getting into new spaces and creating new work.

I found a love for teaching. It feels good to get to get into other creatives' heads and give them freedom to play and explore the crevices of their craniums.

I find it's easier to talk about my work and process now. My process feels more relaxed. I invest in higher quality

materials now. I'm more intentional with my work and my time and my relationships.

JASPER: Among your colleagues in SC, who have been your greatest influences and why?

KRAJEWSKI: Ed Madden never ceases to inspire me with his work. You read his stuff and it just stays with you. Haunting you in the best way. I had the chance to collaborate with him on a piece that hung in the Columbia Museum of Art a few years ago.

Andy White, with his metal scrap work, found objects, his technical execution, and the fact that we both love to integrate mechanical elements to create organic shapes or creatures. His execution of his creations gets me every time.

Cory Davis, his drive is inspiring. He's always looking at what's next. I enjoy his comics and his style. He's carved out something unique for himself and it's taking him places.

And the beautiful and talented Amy Brower. Among our many collabs, she brought me into the film world where I was cast to play a love-struck artist in "The Muse" and myself in a few video collabs that we shot and edited over the lockdown.

JASPER: Few people can sign their names on a restaurant wall, much less an entire restaurant. What were some of your greatest challenges in creating the art for the restaurant Black Rooster?

KRAJEWSKI: By far, the biggest fucking canvas I've ever worked on. Kristian (Niemi) gave me free rein, which excited and challenged me. It's really easy to overthink everything while staring down a blank white box with a black oil pen in your hand. Each piece is one shot, no do overs. No stencils or projectors. Just me vs a blank wall. Once I got started and saw the space beginning to take form, I got increasingly comfortable letting my instincts take over. During the first lock down of 2020, that place



pendre tout ce
que vous avez



was a ghost town. Every time I walked in there to create, it felt like I was breathing just a little life into it. I will always be grateful to Kristian for trusting me with that space. It's been a beautiful process 2 years in the making and still going.

JASPER: Could the owner, Kristian Niemi, paint over your work if he chose to?

KRAJEWSKI: Fuck no. [laughs]

JASPER: What else have you been working on over the past few years?

KRAJEWSKI: Mixed media 3-D installations, a collab with Justin Vorhis and Lucas Sams. We did an interactive piece for the art park behind State Street. Justin welded the drum body and Lucas and I laid in the imagery. It's easy working with Lucas because our collab feels like an ongoing conversation. We've been working together for so long (over ten years) that working together feels effortless.

There's the mural work at Rooster and more recently at Soundbites on Sumter Street.

Also, Between the Antlers, in Georgetown, Tom Hall's new venture. This multimedia installation is in the works

with the prolific Trahern Cook, who I'm excited to collaborate with for the first time.

Commissions, always. I just mailed off a 36 by 48 by 2 to Colorado Springs.

New work- playing with some 3rd material, wood cutouts, epoxy, plexiglass, with my business partner Barry Wheeler. He always keeps me on my toes and up to date on new techniques and technology. He's been hugely instrumental in getting the website off the ground, creating and releasing limited edition prints and getting out there on various online platforms.

People and Paint, a hard-cover book featuring real people posing as canvases for my work, is in pre-production. Release is TBA but look for it in the coming year.

JASPER: Where and when can we next see your work?

KRAJEWSKI: The Black Rooster, obviously, which is a work in progress. Early Fall there are some group shows that I'll be a part of. Online at KrajewskiArt.com. I have a solo show coming up in the Fall at HOPF Gallery. And later this year, I'll be opening up my personal studio for private showings.





SIDEBAR: A Few Words from Kristian Niemi – Owner of Black Rooster and Bourbon Columbia

“Michael was my first choice...actually my ONLY choice...to take this on. I knew I wanted his artwork to be in the restaurant but limiting it to framed paintings seemed too restrictive. Also, the wall space didn’t really lend itself to hanging artwork. So, I figured, why not just let him create his art directly on the walls and turn the restaurant into an evolving work of art itself?”

It’s fun to watch our regulars scan the walls when they are at their tables and point out things they are seeing for the first time. They’ll get up from their tables and get closer to see the detail work. Some of our friends and family have had their names immortalized in some of the drawings, so they’ll search for them.

I’m fucking thrilled with it! It’s better than I ever imagined. He’ll shoot me little videos or pics while he’s working on something late at night, but to see it in person the next morning is really exciting.”



Photography courtesy of the artist

Learning with Jasper – Carleen Maur Talks about the Art of Experimental Filmmaking

JASPER: Carleen, we know that you are an experimental filmmaker, and we want to learn more about you and your work. Can you tell us about where you trained and how you got to SC?

MAUR: I went to undergrad at Otterbein University in Ohio, where I was first exposed to experimental cinema. I had extremely supportive faculty who encouraged me to develop my practice. I'm lucky enough to work with some of those faculty as collaborators now. Next, I went to University of Iowa where I received an MFA in Film and Video Production. That's where I really developed my voice as a filmmaker and artist. I worked with incredible filmmakers during my time there. I was

teaching as a visiting assistant professor at Iowa before I landed at USC, where I found a home in Media Arts!

JASPER: What made USC attractive to you?

MAUR: 100% the people! And maybe the winter weather as well. I remember sitting down with my mentor in Iowa talking about how lovely everyone was at USC and discussing broad existential life questions as one might do in a cafe in Iowa City. I've only ever lived in small or mid-size cities, and I've come to appreciate the opportunities that are here, or the flexibility of making things happen! Especially as an artist, community influences my work so much, it's important to me that I'm somewhere that I don't end up feeling estranged or isolated.

JASPER: Can you help us understand the genre of experimental film? What makes a film experimental and what are some of the missions of experimental film?

MAUR: I think the easiest way to approach experimental film is to not actually think of it as a film. And that's not an entirely fair assessment because some experimental films are meant to be digested like mainstream film and video. I've always approached experimental film as if it were a form of studio arts, dance, or music. It's less about finding a linear narrative, and more about time, space and feeling. Occasionally meant to wash over you or they could be incredibly didactic. The rules of experimental film are there are no rules!

JASPER: What are some easily accessible films you can refer our readers to as examples?

MAUR: Maya Deren (easily found on Youtube) is an example of an early experimental filmmaker. But if you really want to get lost in experimental media, there's a website called ubu.com which has a film and video section dedicated to experimental filmmakers!

JASPER: And how do your films fit into the general array of films out there?

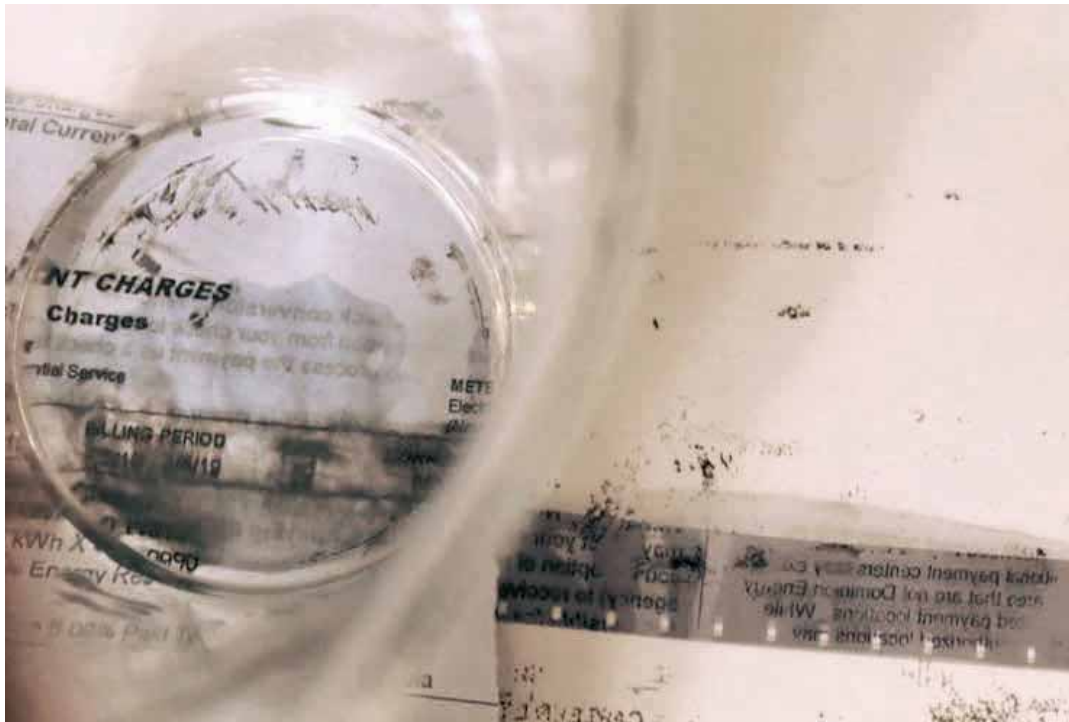
MAUR: I view my practice as hybrid, some methods are borrowed from narrative filmmaking, some from documentary. I lean on the term experimental because I resist linear narratives. My films are always about resistance and lately, the joy and humor within resistance. While my films aren't really for one particular audience, I do feel my films are in conversations with folks who feel they are on the outside looking in.

JASPER: What are a couple of your favorite, of the films you've made, and why do you value them?

MAUR: This is tough because some of the films I love the most I also hate. My more personal films, *Estranged* and *Lesbian Farmer*, required me to be pretty vulnerable. I finished them in the isolation of the pandemic, and I didn't realize until I started screening them in front of people how painful it was to me to screen them. Maybe that's why I make films, I can do something I wouldn't normally do for an audience or myself and then it's too late to take it back, it's been recorded so I might as well screen it.



Screen shot from *Traces* by Carleen Maur



Production shot from *Traces* by Carleen Maur

JASPER: Where did the inspiration for these films come from?

MAUR: These films came from a combination of my life experience, and other art and artists. I've always been interested in camouflage, surveillance, gender, and sexuality and much of my work integrates these ideas. Ariel Goldberg's *The Estrangement Principle* and Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* were some of the books I was reading (and re reading!) during the production of these films in particular.

JASPER: And where have you had the opportunity to screen your films?

MAUR: I've been lucky enough to be able to screen nationally and internationally. Some of my favorites (although it's hard to pick!) Microscope Gallery, New York, Ann Arbor Film Festival, *CROSSROADS* at San Francisco Cinematheque, *Antimatter* in Victoria BC Canada, Harkat 16mm Film Festival, West Mumba India, *Experiments in Cinema*, Albuquerque, New Mexico, *Internationales Festival Zeichen der Nacht* - Berlin, *ANALOGICA 11* in Bolzano, Italy, *Engauge Experimental Film Festival* at Interbay Cinema Society.

JASPER: What are you working on now?

MAUR: I'm working on two films, one digital and one on 16mm. The 16mm analogue film has been shot and hand processed (In my bathtub!) and I'm going through the process of scanning it. Another Pandemic-made film, it centers on identity, hiding in the trees, and blood. I was learning to mountain bike during the pandemic, and I kept falling. I started to think about our relationship to blood and all its meanings, constructed or otherwise. That's really where the idea stemmed from. The second film, while very early in production, centers on metal barricades you see set up at events. I'm interested in sociopolitical barriers, and I like thinking about the symbolism of the physical barricades themselves. Who made them and with what materials? What do they do, what could they do, so on.

JASPER: Anything exciting happening on your personal film art horizon that you can share with us?

MAUR: I'll be screening my film *Estranged* on April 26th at Rhode Island School of Art and Design as a part of a curated screening series. My film *Traces* is also premiering at *Traverse Vidéo* in Toulouse, France which will have an online screening later in April!

6 more local acts



REX DARLING

For fans of ethereal and captivating female vocals, look no further than Columbia's own Rex Darling.

A band of classically trained musicians including frontperson Catherine Hunsinger, Jon Vail, CJ Rhodes, Blake Hunter, Brendan Bill, Brett Nash, and Tony Opus, they've successfully sowed the seeds for a beautiful group with a vibrant and bright future. They've had plenty of performances around town already between single release shows and live cover shows at local venues including New Brookland Tavern and Transmission Arcade.

If you fancy the sounds of bands like Frankie Cosmos or Daughter, Rex Darling's a perfect fit for your playlists. They are a highly versatile band as they've recently done some cover work of Billie Eilish's music at live shows and have had experience with touring around the state at other popular venues in Greenville and Charleston, resulting in a loyal, appreciative fanbase.

Their success has led to their recent release of the new single "Carcinogen," a hauntingly beautiful melody that is a perfect example of the band's unique sound. The track initially evokes the feeling you're listening to them sing by a bonfire on a cool night before a welcome tempo change that would make any audience want to get out of their seats and dance. Other great tracks that highlight the folk-influenced sound of the band include "High Fashion Crazy" and "Invisible Ink."

Rex Darling has an upcoming live show at Petra's Bar in Charlotte on April 23, 2022, and for a more local opportunity to watch them in action, they'll be at the New Brookland Tavern on May 28, 2022, with Business School, OuterEgo, and The Dog Apollo.

- Emily Moffitt



SPACE FORCE

A group that prides itself on mystifying audiences with creative anonymity but never hesitates to perform some groovy jazz when an opportunity arises, Space Force has a sound put together with a futuristic profile, an extremely strong percussive foundation, and excellent bass lines.

The aptly titled album, Space Force, is packed with a variety of great jazz tracks to fit any mood you're looking for. They've got a sound that would fit any late-night drive, a chill get-together with your closest friends, or a night out on the town at your favorite bar. Having started as a band in 2018, the group has already marketed itself with a distinct image; once you see the group on stage in orange spacesuits, sunglasses, and baseball caps, you know you're in for a treat. And Jasper has the inside scoop on who those boys in the ballcaps are. Well, sort of. Stephen Stokes is Bananakin Starthruster, Joe Pearson is Cosmojojo, Tommy Embrich is Major Tom, Chance Glass is Admiral GlassFadaze, and James Ervin is Bruce Willis?

If you're a fan of guitar-heavy tracks like those by Joe Satriani and want something a bit more mellow, or you've found interest in the Dave Brubeck Quartet and want something more experimental from the world of jazz, Space Force is the perfect group to bridge that gap. Their music focuses on the transient, astronomical, and cosmic qualities of space itself. "One Small Step" creates visuals of watching stars fly by as you're relaxing on the moon. "Wormhole" is a standout that feels funky, like you're throwing a party in a free-floating spaceship.

- Emily Moffitt



ADMIRAL RADIO

Coty Hoover and Becca Smith make contemporary folk music together as Admiral Radio, utilizing close duo harmony atop a bed of acoustic guitars and banjo to create a sound that's traditional, yet timeless. Like it did for many of us, the pandemic threw a wrench in the couple's plans—full-time gigging was impossible, so they retrenched with new 'day jobs' and restricted their music-making to their couch, mostly. Aside from a few livestreams, that's where they left things for most of the last two years.

A fondness for old-time music and gospel songs led them to focus on some well-worn classics when it came time to record a new album marking their re-entry to playing live music, however, and *Songs From The Vault* is the result. Released in April, the recording features seven familiar tunes, from "I'll Fly Away" and "Darling Clementine" to "You Are My Sunshine," and "This Land Is Your Land."

The duo's distinct vocal personality colors even these chestnuts, with Smith's languid solo line opening "Leaning On The Everlasting Arms" joined by Hoover's harmony in the chorus for an unhurried and elegant recasting of the hymnal warhorse. Given Admiral Radio's track record with excellent original tunes such as "Two Star Motel" from their debut, it's a real treat to hear the joy with which they deliver songs like this from which they can trace their musical lineage.

- Kevin Oliver



HILLMOUSE

When Barnwell frontperson Tyler Gordon reintroduced himself last year as a virtually one-man band project under the "Hillmouse" moniker, initial head-scratching (Why mess with a great band with an already established reputation?) gave way to the catchy pop songs on the debut album *Smiling Politely*. Gordon played everything except the drums, but it sounds like a full band recorded in a studio—credit Archer Avenue's Kenny McWilliams with that bit of audio wizardry.

Gordon is sticking with the Hillmouse brand in 2022, but not necessarily with the full band that he put together to play these songs. A late winter set saw him reproducing the album's tunes in a solo acoustic mode, where the strength of his songwriting stands out even more.

Hillmouse is still a studio creation, and as such it has allowed Gordon the freedom to explore different sonic territory than his previous work, expanding the universe of songcraft along with it.

- Kevin Oliver



CANDY COFFINS

As long as Candy Coffins are around, goth rock will have a local representative here in Columbia.

Formed by veterans of multiple area rock bands several years back, the group has undergone a few membership changes but retains the core of singer/guitarist Jame Lathren and lead guitarist Tom Alewine.

The band's sound harkens back to the '80s heyday of Psychedelic Furs, The Church, Gene Loves Jezebel, and other goth-leaning acts; it's not a tribute given the collective experience of the musicians involved, some of whom participated in goth bands back then as well (Tom Alewine's tenure in the much-loved Bachelors Of Art being the obvious example).

During the pandemic, Candy Coffins went to the time and expense to create an album-length pro shot live video, audience free, to be able to put something out. April 2022 saw them revisit the online music model with an appearance on the video broadcast series "At The Addition," and launch a new round of live show dates.

- Kevin Oliver



LANG OWEN

A songwriter who has been decades in the making, Lang Owen has been a familiar sight around town at open mic nights and anywhere a thoughtful singer-songwriter might find an appreciative audience.

Enlisting fellow musician Todd Mathis to record his upcoming new full-length album *She's My Memory* was a smart move. The framework of Mathis' production and the gentle strumming of Owen's fragile folksiness gives the tunes a musical depth to match the lyrical themes.

With members of The Runout, Admiral Radio, and more locals along for the studio sessions, the overall effect is evocative of the 1970's output of Rickie Lee Jones and Paul Simon, but also encompassing the literate prose of songwriters such as Pierce Pettis and John Gorka.

Look for the album on June 17th but catch Owen around town at a microphone near you soon.

- Kevin Oliver

Bogotá Burning

By Juan David Cruz-Duarte

I'm back in town,
but the town has grown restless.
I watch the news sometimes.
The streets are filled with violence,
every night, young men and women go missing.
Sordid things are happening behind closed doors.
The radio waves transport voices
that talk about police brutality
and Molotov cocktails.
Everything is broken.

To make things worse,
every day, hundreds of people die
because of the virus.
Lungs running out of oxygen,
bodies running out of heartbeats,
minds running out of light,
lives running out of time.
I'm not exaggerating,
it's all over the news.

Death seems to be taking over again,
and there is not much we can do about it.

Old statues are burning,
the streets are burning,
the clouds and the wind are burning,
even the rain is burning
like gasoline.
The entire city is burning
and I
am burning with it.

Juan David Cruz-Duarte was born in Bogotá, Colombia. In 2018, he earned a doctorate in Comparative Literature from the University of South Carolina. His poetry and fiction have appeared in Axxón, El Axioma, Fall Lines, Blue Collar Review, the Dead Mule School of Southern Literature, and Escarabeo, among others. He is the author of the collection of short stories Dream a little dream of me: cuentos siniestros, the novel La noche del fin del mundo, and the poetry collection Léase después de mi muerte (Poemas 2005–2017). Cruz-Duarte is also a political cartoonist, his cartoons can be found in Las 2 Orillas. He currently lives in Bogotá.

The Evening of Snow

By Terri McCord

The woodpecker's noonday shadow
is like a Brancusi,
the shadow more visible
than the bird.

Even the worn hammock
looks newly made

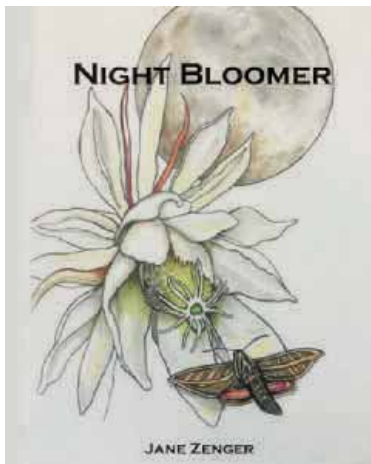
above the cerulean blue
striations, small linked
diamonds of webbing.

Terri McCord is a 2022 Pushcart nominee and a finalist for the 2022 McCray Nickens Fellowship (sponsored by the South Carolina Academy of Authors and the South Carolina Writers Association). She has taught art, writing, and design. McCord is also a 2001-2002 recipient of a South Carolina Arts Commission juried artist literary fellowship. She has three published volumes of poetry and is looking for a home for another.

McCord was one of the poets included in Jasper's first year of publication.

New Books in the Laureate Series from Muddy Ford Press

Night Bloomer by Jane Zenger



Blood, Part 3

By Jane Zenger

“Who writes about blood?”

The same one who writes about
magic and love and rivers, sweet peppers
and camping under the Mexican desert sky
with stars so vivid we could see our naked bodies
glowing with anticipation.

In the Appalachian camping days
we showered off the semen and blood
under soft waterfalls – remember?

And in Alaska, the rainbow northern lights
surrounded us like an alien landing.
We wrapped ourselves in a blanket
and leaned on the van shivering,
necks strained looking up
tuning into the splendid colors of the universe.

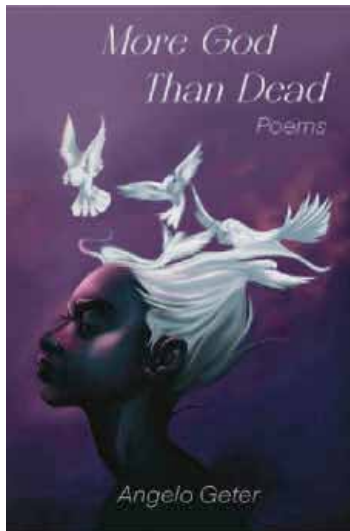
That night you sometimes remember.
But this day is gone before it happens.
My wounds are of no consequence to you anymore.
Our love is the empty shore after the hurricane.

“Blood, Part 3” is excerpted from Night Bloomer, a new book of poetry by Jane Zenger, published by Muddy Ford Press in spring 2022. Night Bloomer is the third volume in the Laureate Series, a collection of books edited by Columbia city poet laureate, and Jasper Magazine poetry editor, Ed Madden. “It is a delight to see Jane’s work coming into print,” Madden says. “I love the way that her voice ranges through memory, from tragic loss to humor and anger (sometimes both at once). The loss of her husband grounds this book, the poems range widely through a lifetime of experience.”

Photography courtesy of the author.

More God Than Dead

by Angelo Geter



Sonnelegy: In Peace

Grief has an uncanny ability to cause paranoia. Makes you wonder if God took your wife, then maybe he has a price tag on your head too. Or perhaps death is a bounty hunter with daddy issues starving for God's sole attention. I find scattered traces of my wife in random places. A few months ago, I heard her voice in a child's golden laugh. Last week, I saw her eyes in the face of one of my students. Today, I tasted her tears when I answered my phone and heard another black man had just lost his wife. Tonight, I'll feel her as I dream, in pieces.

"Sonnelegy: In Peace" is excerpted from More God Than Dead, a new book of poetry by Angelo Geter, published by Muddy Ford Press in spring 2022. More God Than Dead is the fourth volume in the Laureate Series, a collection of books edited by Columbia city poet laureate, and Jasper Magazine poetry editor, Ed Madden.

According to Marjory Wentworth, South Carolina Poet Laureate 2003 – 2020, "As though he needed to invent a new language for the unfathomable grief he experienced when his young wife passed away, poet Angelo Geter uses all the tools of a poet in his collection More God Than Dead. No two poems look alike on the page, reminding us of all the different ways that grief manifests itself. From list poems to ghazals, Geter articulates his loss with unflinching honesty. He even includes "Instructions for the Day After a Long Night of Grieving." But he also remembers his late wife Jasmine in these poems, allowing us to share in their joy. Urging us to 'cry until the sobs become songs,' Angelo Geter reminds us of the redemptive power of poetry."

Photography courtesy of the author.

Artist Profile: Lucy Bailey

By Emily Moffitt

Lucy Bailey is a ceramicist from South Carolina with a passion for sculpting figurative busts and small-scale sculptures.

Highly skilled when it comes to creating interesting textures the artist uses anything from mica to salvaged table legs to create brand-new works of art.

Bailey always looks for new and innovative ways to create her sculptures, like combining different disciplines of art. “Very recently I have also begun drawing and using scratchboards,” Bailey says. “This 2D work allows me to explore imagery that just doesn’t translate well into clay.”

Her art series all mesh together to create a distinct style of sculpting that is instantly recognizable as a unique piece of Lucy Bailey art.

Bailey has had experience with master classes and the support of other artists around her and her community. She looks up to ceramicists like Lisa Clague, Janis Mars Wunderlich, Adrian Arleo, Margaret Keelan, and Debra Fritz.

She finds inspiration in SC artist K. Wayne Thornley’s paintings and mixed media works and looks forward to any future opportunity for collaboration.





Untitled by Lucy Bailey

Artist Profile: Diko Pekdemir-Lewis

By Emily Moffitt

Anton & Maxine Clothing is a captivating, stylish and chic designer studio based in Columbia, SC. Created by Diko Pekdemir-Lewis in 2014, her brand has grown immensely since then.

Pekdemir-Lewis grew up in a highly creative and fashion minded household. “My mom was a singer and a poem writer, and my dad is a Bespoke tailor,” the designer says. “Both enjoyed and loved their craft and shared their joy with me.” Her dad’s expertise and enjoyment of tailoring inspired Diko to become a fashion designer herself, something she wanted from a young age.

Pekdemir-Lewis has plenty of formal training, from graduating with a Bespoke Tailor Apprenticeship degree to a Bachelor of Fine Art in Fashion Design from Modeschule Schloss Eller in Dusseldorf. She used her time in school to master fundamentals and her technical skills to allow herself to create freely while still making fashionably functional clothing.

Coco Chanel has been one of her biggest inspirations, and she looks up to the work of South Carolina’s own Tabitha Ott for her wearable art jewelry.

When we asked about her ideas for making life better for Midlands area artists, Pekdemir-Lewis says that the development of an official arts district would be beneficial in that it would allow for an area where locals and visitors could “go to enjoy and shop different mediums of art.”





Fashion by Diko Pekdemir-Lewis

Columbia's Congaree Vista Welcomes Motherhood to the Public Art Collection

By Cindi Boiter

Photography by Stephen Chesley

Artist Stephen Chesley has a lot of ideas about the way the city of Columbia should both look and serve the citizens who live here. There's a good reason. Not only is Chesley a gifted painter and photographer who works out of a creative space at Stormwater Studios off Huger Street, he is also trained as a professional city planner. So, when Chesley has an idea about what to look for in a new piece of public art, and where to put it, it's a good idea to listen.

Luckily, Chesley serves on the public art committee for the Vista Guild, the governing body over the businesses and services that operate out of Columbia's Congaree

Vista, along with some of the most knowledgeable and trusted arts leaders in the city including Clark Ellefson and Wim Roefs. When the committee was charged with facilitating a new piece of public art for the area, Chesley recalled the work of a sculptor he had met some time ago and he sought her out.

Nora Valdez, originally from Argentina, is a professionally trained stone carver whose work has been commissioned, exhibited, and permanently displayed all over the world. Valdez currently works in Boston, but a map of her art would ping in places across the country as well as in China and South America.

Chesley reached out to Valdez and, after viewing her work, the committee recommended that the Congaree Vista Guild purchase and install her 5'2" sculpture entitled Motherhood.

Carved from Indiana Limestone, because the artist finds the material easy to maintain and "particularly good for outside work. Limestone comes in many



different consistencies,” she says,” but the limestone from Indiana is the most compact and holds up well to weather over time.”

The piece was installed in February on top of a specially constructed platform that raised the profile of the sculpture to more than 6 feet in height. It is located at the corner of Lady and Gadsden Streets.

In April, during Artista Vista, Nora Valdez traveled back to Columbia for the dedication of the new art, where she was welcomed by other members of Stormwater Studios, also in the Columbia Vista, but closer to the actual Congaree River.

According to Valdez, “Motherhood represents more than just the concept of Mother. She represents a working mother. An immigrant. A mother who is holding her family together with few resources. A mother who weathers her challenges with strength. A mother who keeps herself going for her family. A mother who is firmly rooted in her determination, as her overlarge feet suggest.”

Valdez continues, “My sculptures of people do not have facial features. Going beyond suggesting any specific face as a representation of beauty (or a measure of value) for women, my work challenges the viewer to see the faceless woman as every woman. Woman as an archetype. Woman as a force. The concept of woman as mother is one that everyone can connect to. The ideal of mother as love and nurture and protection is universal. Especially in the face of a challenge.”

Chesley is particularly happy with the resulting addition to what he references as the “sculptural corridor,” a trail of public art that will ultimately run from Main Street down Lady Street and, one day, all the way to the waterfront.

According to Chesley, a piece honoring motherhood is especially well suited for now, “given the horror that mothers and their children are experiencing in Ukraine.” His thinks his photography of the piece (pictured) has a benevolent, but also surreal quality to it. “At certain times, she halos,” he says.

In any case, the presence of additional feminine energy on the public art landscape in Columbia is highly needed and well appreciated. No doubt Motherhood will grow to have a special place in the hearts of Soda Citizens for years to come.





Profile David Platts

Executive Director –
SC Arts Commission

By Cindi Boiter
Photo by Brodie Porterfield

It's hard to find David Platts sitting still. Unless he's sitting across from a SC state senator lobbying for more funds and a greater respect for the enumerable roles the arts play in the livelihood of the state and the lives of SC citizens. And by the way, he does try to number them – though he hasn't stopped counting yet.

Platts came to his position as executive director of the SC Arts Commission in 2019 following a long tenure as the Arts and Science Coordinator in the Lancaster County school district. His previous posts have found him serving on boards that include the Palmetto State Arts Education, the SC Arts Alliance, and nationally, serving on the board of the Education Advisory Committee of the JFK Center's Partnership in Education program as well as that of South Arts, out of Atlanta.

"I have always tried to find a place where I could be of service in the mission of growing the arts and sharing

the many advantages of making the arts a vital part of any community," says Platts, who is a graduate of St. Olaf College in Minneapolis with graduate degrees from U of SC.

Platts, an enthusiastic arts advocate, has his roots in church music where he first found his own form of validation as an artist. He credits his mother and his first piano teacher for the development of his personal relationship with music.

The youngest of three children, when it was time for young David to begin piano lessons in the second grade, his mother was tired of constantly reminding and cajoling her children to practice. "She had had it! I was on my own and my mother gave me the freedom to proceed at my own pace," he says.

Elizabeth Truluck, Platts' piano teacher and keyboardist at the church his family attended, had established the

practice of regularly including her students in Sunday services. “We all did a piano duet with her one Sunday per month,” Platts says. “I fell in love with it. There was no stopping. I had to keep going.”

At 16, Platts accepted his first job offer to be paid to play at a different church. He soon realized that though the theology differed, the essential message was the same and, even more importantly, that he found purpose and joy in sitting before a keyboard whether he was in church or elsewhere. Platts has continued to play music throughout his life—he is 54-year-old now—even going back as far as to work a gig with Betty Haring at Workshop Theatre “back in the day,” as he says.

This love of music and recognition of the important role the arts play in the development of a well-rounded human being soon became part of Platts’ personal mission—a mission he still champions.

“In Lancaster, we made it a priority that every child experience a live performance of ballet and the symphony while they were in school,” he says, noting that the Columbia City Ballet was one of the arts organizations he helped bring to his facilities while he was there.

Making art in the form of music a part of every child’s life also spilled over into the way Platts and his husband, Ron Cox, who is the dean of the Palmetto College at USC, raised their children. Though grown now, all three children learned to sing while they were still at home.

“Ron is a good base,” says Platts, who is a vocalist himself. “And we started all three kids out in the alto line. Our home was full of music.”

Soon after taking on the position of executive director at SCAC, Platts began a “canvas of the people,” going all over the state to assess the strengths and needs of SC arts communities. “I heard loud and clear that folks wanted more opportunities and more funding for the arts,” he says.

Among his strategic plans is the challenge of increasing the recognition that there is a “business of the arts” not everyone recognizes. “The arts industry in South Carolina provides a 46 to 1 return on our investment.” Platts uses examples such as Lake City and Newberry, SC to demonstrate how the arts can grow both a

community and an economy. “We support the largest communities as well as the small towns in rural South Carolina,” he says, cheering on the role of the arts in “creative place making.”

“Artists and arts organizations and community members come together to define how they want to explore and interact with the arts in small towns.” This is important, he says “for people who don’t realize how they are connected with the arts. We have a rich cultural art scene in South Carolina, we have craftsmanship passed down through generations. Oftentimes, I find myself working to build connections that way, too.”

“I am a product of a small town, myself,” he says. “I needed to express myself and I was given music. It was a way for me to make something beautiful and it changed everything about my life.”

A devotee of pretty much every art form, Platts can delineate the many ways arts impact individuals and cultures, from discussing how music builds patterns for brain function that facilitate a better grasp on mathematics to how theatre develops character to how murals create a sense of community pride

Platts also highly values instilling a recognition of the value of art from the ground up. “It is my strong belief that every child deserves the same opportunities to expose themselves and learn about the arts and to connect with some art form,” he says.

“Art isn’t optional,” he continues. “It is essential to a community to have a healthy active arts scene with opportunities for everyone. We are committed to diversity, inclusivity, accessibility, and equity in arts opportunities, and we need to be leaders in this movement. There is no excuse for anything less.”

If you haven’t met David Platts yet it’s only because he’s busy doing the business of preserving, enriching, and amplifying South Carolina’s most authentic and, some would argue, most abundant resource—our multifaceted propensity to create. South Carolina has a unique and crucial story to tell and Platts believes our arts are the most comprehensive and powerful way to tell it.

Artist Profile: Rebecca Horne

By Emily Moffitt

Rebecca Horne is an abstract artist based in West Columbia with a flair for fluid acrylics and mixed media work.

A self-taught artist who grew up exposed to art from a young age, she created an abundance of work ranging from landscapes to images of flowers and animals, until she found that sweet spot of inspiration in the abstract. She knows that the art world can be divided into the fun and fine categories, so she continues to find that perfect balance throughout her work.

“Abstract, for me, is the most creative way that I can express my artistic nature,” Horne says. “It’s completely intuitive from start to finish...it’s very liberating to be able to create a piece of art out of nothing but a feeling that this should go here and that should go there.”

Horne also finds inspiration in the art community around South Carolina and cites other abstract artists including Pascale Sexton Bilgis and Ginger Thomas as artists with admirable disciplines for their craft. Horne enjoys finding challenges and utilizing these obstacles to her advantage, allowing for the art of surprise to guide her.

We asked Horne about the one thing that would make life better for artists in the Midlands area. “The Midlands area has really started to embrace the arts. So many opportunities are available. Maybe some kind of mentor program to help new artists navigate their way into the art scene.”





Untitled by Rebecca Horne

IN MEMORIAM

Mary Bentz Gilkerson

Proficient visual artist and devoted arts educator whose lessons on life and art affected thousands across her career teaching at the University of South Carolina and Columbia College, as well as via an expansive electronic tutelage practice, Mary Bentz Gilkerson was a model of professionalism and integrity. Mary's lessons will live on through her students, colleagues, friends, and family. We are forever better for having shared the earth with Mary.
-Cindi Boiter



Mary is pictured with former student and this issue's cover artist, Lindsay Radford.

Photo courtesy of Lindsay Radford

IN MEMORIAM

Wim Roefs

On Monday May 9th, Wim Roefs, founder and owner of If Art Gallery and one of the founders of 701 Center for Contemporary Art, suffered a crashing heart attack at his gallery on Lincoln Street. On Thursday, the 12th, Wim passed away, leaving his wife Eileen Waddell and hundreds, if not thousands, of international friends and colleagues behind.

The pain of the loss of Wim Roefs from our arts community cannot be overestimated. Wim brought a sense of gravitas to us that many people didn't know was missing. He reminded us that while art is in no way an endeavor of the elite, it should be taken seriously and respected for the vital role it plays in daily life. Wim made contemporary art accessible to all of us and, thankfully, his legacy will live on as long as art in Columbia does.

For the most part, Wim did not indulge in the subterfuge of Southern hospitality or the artifice of American social politics. I don't know if it was because he was Dutch or because he was Wim, but he and his personality defied any number of platitudes about how we are meant to interact with one another. Instead, he behaved with complete and transparent honesty. Wim was my favorite kind of person in that there was no second-guessing when it came to how he felt about you and your work. His honest and straightforward demeanor required a tough skin and a healthy sense of self. If you didn't have both when you entered into a relationship with Wim, it was imperative that you develop them for your relationship to continue. I appreciated that.

Condolences to all as we mourn the passing of one of our most respected—and beloved—community members.

And thank you, Wim, for everything you taught us.

-Cindi Boiter



Photography courtesy of If Art Gallery

During the 11 plus years my office has been two doors down from if Art there were many days and nights where I was able to stop in and just enjoy a talk with Wim about any number of interests we shared.

We both parked our cars in a garage a block away from our shops. For me, I walked past the large window at the entrance of If Art on my way to my car every day. This was the showcase window. It allowed anyone walking down Lincoln St., one of the busier pedestrian streets in Columbia, to walk past if Art and view what Wim had to showcase that day, week, or month.

My thoughts in the past few days, walking past that large window, have turned to the fact that for the past 11 years I have seen every artist that Wim has hung in that window. There have been local, upcoming artists in that window. There have been nationally recognized and established artists in that window. I've seen beautiful small painting of flowers, and large painting that served as a bit of a middle finger to whoever walked by. Wim brought us the art he liked to champion and make no mistake, want you to buy so you could show it off to your friends. I was lucky enough to see it all.

-Wade Sellers



Artists for Africa

By Christina Xan

Photography courtesy of Artists for Africa

When Cooper Rust traveled to Nairobi, Kenya, over a decade ago for a week of math and English tutoring, she had no idea it was the place her future dwelled—and the place in which she would support the futures of thousands of children.

Artists for Africa (A4A) started in this single spark. Before she even boarded the plane back from Nairobi, C. Rust was ruminating on the changes and growth that could happen in this city and for the children who inhabited it.

The city contained nine million people full of life and rife with culture, but their access to education was limited, especially for extracurriculars like art, which are not part of the education programs in Nairobi. And these children wanted to make art. They craved new knowledge and paths to create.

“It just felt wasteful that there were these beautiful people who wanted to express themselves through art and just didn’t have any type of avenue to do that,” C. Rust intimates.

Brie Rust remembers her sister excitedly telling her about her plans to bring art to and teach dance in Africa,

particularly due to the lack of concrete plans about what the next steps would be.

“I’ve always said we’re split,” C. Rust jokes, “I got the right brain, and she got the left.”

But B. Rust shared her sister’s vision and laid out what they would need: to register as a 501c3 organization in the state of South Carolina, gather a board of directors, and start fundraising. An easy yes kicked off a not-so-easy but extraordinarily powerful journey.

B. Rust wanted a chance to test these new waters, so she reached out to John Whitehead, who shared the Columbia Music Festival Association’s (CMFA) blackbox space for Artists for Africa’s first event, a fundraiser filled with performances by local talent—they raised \$7,000.

“We were just blown away. I mean, holy cow, people want this,” B. Rust remembers, “I guess if you really put your mind and effort into something then you can pull it off.”

With this success, the group decided to set things in motion in Africa, which they initiated by working with a

UK-based organization that shared similar goals: Anno's Africa. Initially, their money went straight to them, and Cooper began teaching in the slum schools. Soon, though, Artists for Africa began to grow in its own right, with increased students excited about the opportunity to go to school and take these expressive extracurriculars.

"I just remember this one moment where we had cookies and snacks to offer the kids, but they said that they'd rather wait until after dance. They just wanted to start dancing," C. Rust recalls, "For the communities here where food is so scarce and some people are really struggling, it was just really incredible to see these kids set cookies aside because they wanted to do an arts class."

In 2015, reacting to this growing desire for dance in the city, C. Rust made the decision to open her own dance company right there in Nairobi—Dance Centre Kenya. This Kenyan company locates talented dancers in the art courses taught at the local schools and offers them a spot in the company.

While the company is fully legally separate from Artists for Africa, they are interrelated, in such that it is part of A4A's purpose is to support the students at the company. Specifically, in order to provide a space for the students practicing dance multiple times per week at the company, the organization created their Boarding House, which provides a living space for the students practicing at Dance Centre Kenya.

"It starts with them just coming two days a week. And then two days a week turns into four days a week, and then transport gets difficult, and then they end up moving in," C. Rust smiles, "And then I end up telling Brie I need another \$7,000 a year to support another child."

Once at the boarding house, C. Rust becomes the students' legal guardian and begins raising funds, not just for them to go to school, but to feed them, clothe them, send them to America to dance, and send them outside the country to continue their studies post-graduation.

The fundraising that has made and continues to make this growth possible comes almost solely from events right here in Columbia, and the majority of those events actually feature artwork and dancers from Kenya. Regardless, the organization does not spend any of the money raised on themselves.

"Every single dollar you give us is going straight to Kenya. We don't have any paid employees. We don't



make t-shirts. We don't do anything like that," B. Rust details, "Every single dollar that somebody is willing to give to us goes straight to a Kenyan pocket."

A4A's two major events are the PostCard Art Series and the Artists From Africa. PostCard Art brings artists from both South Carolina and the country as a whole together to create postcard sized art. At the annual event, patrons have drinks and hors d'oeuvres as they peruse and purchase art.

Artists From Africa is particularly special because the organization is able to bring dancers from Dance Centre Kenya, as well as a few talented individuals from the general classes, to train for the summer at the South Carolina Summer Dance Conservatory at the University of South Carolina, and at the end of the summer, the group gives a performance.

While in America, these students also get to meet their sponsors. Each student in the Boarding House has 2-4 sponsors in the States, who regularly get updates and photos and notes from the students they sponsor. They finally get to meet in person during the dancers' summers here.

"They have dinner with them, or they go swim in their pool, or they go play golf with them and overall get a more one-on-one experience," B. Rust explains, "And then [the sponsors] end up doing birthdays and braces and all kinds of things for them."

This circularity, this ability to meet and mingle and share, is one of the primary goals of the organization. It is the hope of Artists for Africa that these children and young adults get to both share their culture and experience new ones at the same time.

"They keep their culture alive," C. Rust shares, "It's not about us coming there and spreading our culture but giving them the ability to go out and spread and share the Kenyan culture around the world."

And as the organization has grown, they have been able to promote additional African cultures. A few years ago, they teamed up with Blythe MacPhee's organization Paper and Glass, which gathers handmade jewelry from Ugandan women. Together they regularly sell this art as a method of fundraising for both the Nairobi schools and the village of Jinja, Uganda.





Beyond growing outwards, Artists for Africa has grown inwards, being able to expand the number of students the schools in Nairobi can hold. In the schools A4A inhabits, where classes may have previously only been able to enroll 90 kids, they can now take 120.

“For these kids, it’s the first time that they’re in a small classroom where their teacher might actually learn their name, where they get to choose an identity,” C. Rust effuses, “And we don’t have any beatings in our classes, which is unusual here, so even the opportunity to be able to make mistakes or do something weird without any repercussions is a really different experience.”

With the growth of their daily classes in Kenya, Artists for Africa’s spark has burned to the point that they are serving over 1,200 kids, are in 6 schools, support 14 kids at the Boarding House, and have 28 staff members and teachers from the Netherlands, UK, Jamaica, Zimbabwe, and, of course, Kenya—not only creating opportunities for the children but 60+ jobs for the adults.

And not only have they been able to make these connections to Kenya, but they have been able to send teenagers out of Kenya for further education and unique experiences with the organization’s A4A Scholarships. Recently, the

organization has sent Boarding House graduates to the English National Ballet in London, Cameron University in Oklahoma, The Joffrey Ballet in Chicago, and more.

“That’s where Artists for Africa is really different. It’s so much more, for us, than quantity—it’s literally taking people from zero to infinite possibilities,” C. Rust asserts, “So, while it started off being essentially a charity running arts programs, it’s turned into something quite different.”

In the near future, the team hopes to continue building, raising more money so that they can extend to more schools in the area and get more staff to serve at the Boarding House. In the not-so-near future, they hope to expand beyond Nairobi to other cities in Kenya and even to other countries in Africa.

“We want to make this sustainable,” C. Rust emphasizes, “We are just trying to make sure that this is going to outlive us.”

Design, Draw, Dance, and Discuss

Come on down to your museum to get in on the fun.



Art Classes

CMA art classes are taught by professional arts educators and include all materials and supplies. Ages 15 and up. Try your hand at a new hobby in a supportive environment with a small class of fellow creative explorers. A few upcoming classes at the CMA include:

Illuminated Light Covers

Saturday, May 28 | 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Art Class: Drawing 101

Saturday, June 4 | 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Art Class: Drawing 102

Saturday, June 18 | 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

More Than Rhythm: A Black Music Series Featuring Benny Starr

Friday, June 3 | 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

SC Lowcountry native and consciousness-raising hip-hop artist Benny Starr sits down with host Dr. Birgitta Johnson, then the recent US Water Alliance Artist-in-Residence performs with a full band. Presented by the Baker & Baker Foundation. Free.

Restoration: A Concert Film

Thursday, June 2 | 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Join us for a free screening of a film created by hip-hop duo Native Son (Benny Starr and Rodrick Cliche) in collaboration with Acres of Ancestry Initiative / Black Agrarian Fund.



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