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Southeastern Art is the Center of MMCC's Newest Show

Editor | February 5, 2014 | News | No comments

By Leila Dycus STAFF WRITER

Southern self-taught art has come to Morgan County for the cultural center's newest exhibit: Georgia and Beyond. Georgia and Beyond, which opened at the Madison-Morgan Cultural Center (MMCC) on Friday, Jan. 17, is a display of southern self-taught artists from the past and present.

The exhibit opened with a talk by the curator Susan Crawley, who recently came to MMCC after leaving her job as the folk art curator for the High Museum in Atlanta. Crawley was asked to put together a folk art show for MMCC. She accepted and the Georgia and Beyond exhibit was established.

"The idea behind the show is, first of all, a general self-taught art show," said Crawley. "It's small but a very good representation of what Georgia and Beyond is all about," said attendee Susan Abramson.

The shows description displays how the southern United States has produced a wide variety of self-taught artists. Crawley designed the show in three galleries, which were divided in distinct ways.

The first gallery is comprised of artists from across the southeast and was designed to show the development and current state self-taught art.

"Self-taught art is not dying," said Crawley. The second gallery is made up of artist from Georgia, and the third gallery was designed to show the works of artist from the southeast with little or no formal training. During Crawley's talk she spoke about common themes in folk art. One of the themes shown in the art is the clash of cultures.

Crawley said that the culture clash usually found in these pieces comes from African and European people reacting to each other. When these two cultures come together the work that is produced is called creolized.

"Its not just African and it's not just European. It's something new," said Crawley. Another theme that is present in the work that makes up Georgia and Beyond is a strong sense of place.

Religious content also makes up many of the pieces. The new Georgia and Beyond exhibit contains both two-dimensional and three-dimensional works. A common element of the three-dimensional pieces is the re-use of materials. Crawley's talk spanned two of the three galleries.

As she spoke she pointed out specific pieces, and, after moving from gallery three to gallery one, Crawley welcomed two of the artists whose work was is display: John Culver and JJ Cromer.

"I'm just a vessel, He uses me to do his work," said artist John Culver referring to God's influence on his art. Culver went on to talk about how he believes that God is the one that uses him to produce his work. Culver discussed how he started making art, saying that he was depressed so he picked up a piece of cardboard and started marking on it. The second artist to speak was JJ Cromer.

Cromer talked about living in Appalachia as a librarian and that, when he came home, he would work on his drawings. Cromer described how his work helped him in figuring out who he is. "Art sort of just happened to me," said artist JJ Cromer. Before closing her talk, Crawley encouraged people to look at the artwork itself, instead of relying on the written descriptions of the pieces. She said that she designed the descriptions with few words so that people would spend more time looking than reading.

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