

ALABAMA ARTS

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State Arts Awards Issue 2007



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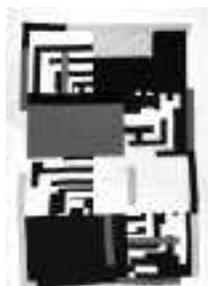
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On the Cover: A red camellia provides the focal point for *Alabama Arts* by Nall, recipient of the 2007 Alabama Distinguished Artist Award. The mixed media piece was completed in 2005 and is 39 1/2" x 31" x 4". From the collection of the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

Greetings from The First Lady

When Bob and I were raising four bright children in rural Clay County, we felt it was important to stimulate their interests in the arts. We frequently drove them to plays, concerts and arts festivals in the major towns of East Alabama as well as going to Birmingham and Atlanta on occasion.

The extra effort paid off. Our son and three daughters participated in choral groups and school plays in high school and broaden their horizons when they moved on to college. I helped organize an arts council that has brought more cultural opportunities to our home town of 2,000 of the sweetest people on earth.

Our state has always been known for its storytellers, authors, actors and singers. Tallulah Bankhead, Harper Lee, Truman Capote, Zelda Fitzgerald, W.C. Handy, Erskine Hawkins, Dinah Washington, Hank Williams, Nat “King” Cole, the Commodores, Jim Nabors, Lionel Richie, Winston Groom, Fannie Flagg and the Alabama band—just to name a very few—have fans around the world.

This awards program and the “Year of Alabama Arts” highlight the amazing wealth of talent that we should appreciate throughout the year. Birmingham is home to the largest free art museum in the Southeast. The Alabama Shakespeare Festival is revered throughout America. Symphonies, dance companies and art museums abound in our cities. Most recently, the terms “American Idol” and world-class folk art have become synonymous with Alabama. The amazing quilts coming from the isolation of Gee’s Bend have delighted the international art world. Events with the interesting names such as Panoply, Kentuck and Bluff Park have reputations far beyond their local environs.

Our state has so much to be proud of and to share with the rest of the world. I am delighted to support efforts of the Alabama Bureau of Tourism & Travel and the Alabama State Council on the Arts to expand audiences of the myriad of art festivals and concert series open to the public. These events improve the quality of life in our communities and elevate the appreciation of arts among all generations.

As busy as my husband and I have been since he became governor, we set aside time in our schedules to



participate in the cultural affairs of Alabama. I encourage you to do the same.

You will enrich your life and move our state closer to realizing the potential of our citizens while we foster a new generation of talent that will bring more joy to the world.

Patsy Riley

First Lady of Alabama





Celebrating Forty

“Years of Alabama Arts”

by Al Head

This year, 2007, is significant for a number of reasons. It is the 40th anniversary of the creation of the Alabama State Council on the Arts. The Council was established by legislation in 1967 to support the diversity of artistic expression and otherwise promote the rich cultural resources of Alabama. This year is also the “Year of Alabama Arts” having been proclaimed so by Governor Bob Riley. The focus on the arts statewide is a partnership between the state Bureau of Tourism and Travel, the State Council on the Arts and the multitude of artists, arts organizations and arts-alive communities in every part of Alabama. The year 2007 is also a time when the Council calls attention, through a long-standing awards program, to some talented, dedicated and giving individuals who have made significant contributions to the arts landscape of Alabama and, in many cases, far beyond.

In the forty-year history of the Council, 13,305 grants have been awarded, totaling over \$68,600,000. Education programs reaching hundreds of thousands of students in schools and alternative arts spaces have been supported. Major cultural institutions have been awarded on-going operational support, making outreach, touring, education and outstanding professional programs possible. World-class artists have been given fellowships and showcase opportunities. Community festivals, exhibitions, concerts, plays, and the widest range of performances have been given financial support at critical junctures in pro-

gramming. Statewide arts service organizations have been established and supported so that the quality and quantity of arts opportunities could be maximized in all parts of the state. Cultural diversity has been funded and celebrated. Traditional arts and folklife, so identified with Alabama, has been preserved, presented and documented for the enjoyment and enlightenment of generations to come. The Council has also begun providing grants for the building and renovation of art facilities. It’s not too much to say that the State Council on the Arts has had a significant impact on the growth of the arts in Alabama over the last forty years.

So, what is the “Year of Alabama Arts” about? Why would dedicating a year for such an “enterprise” be needed, desired or deemed important? Well, the state does have an incredible number of outstanding artists, in every genre of work. It has an exciting array of arts programs throughout the year and in all regions. Alabama has art-rich communities that are exciting to visit and live in.



Unfortunately, the arts in Alabama may also be a best kept secret, taken for granted by too many Alabamians and simply not known about by out-of-state folks. With this undeserved obscurity in mind, 2007 becomes a great time to show off the state's cultural resources and brag about people, places and things that make the arts in Alabama so engaging. The "Year of Alabama Arts" logo, an image taken from the Pine Burr Quilt (official state quilt) by Qunnie Pettway of Gee's Bend, is being proudly displayed at programs, in publications, in windows and on banners as part of celebrating the unique quality of life we enjoy in the state.

Speaking of celebration, the Council's award program is designed to be just that. It is a time for the arts community to gather and pay tribute to a group of special people who, in different ways, make our state a better place to live. The recipients of the 2007 awards represent artists, educators, patrons and community leaders who have had a major impact and have made positive change a reality. Their highlights of effort range from internationally acclaimed exhibitions to performances that bind entire communities, and from famous stages reserved for luminaries to classrooms filled with young people who represent our future. The awards event, however, is also a rallying time for all those visionaries, volunteers, supporters, public officials and creators who can, and do, make the arts happen in Alabama. Recognizing special people among us from time to time inspires others to pick up the flag and follow those who lead and made a difference. Awards on the one hand say, "thank you and well done," but also to others, "follow in these footsteps, much still needs to be done." To all of the 2007 recipients we extend a "hearty congratulations." To the rest we issue the challenge, "let's do more to support the arts and artists of Alabama." We do have a lot to be proud of and to celebrate.

*Al Head is the
Executive Director
of the Alabama State
Council on the Arts*





Roberta Gamble

ARTS ICON BRINGS BROADWAY

TO A SMALL TOWN

by Angie Long

She'll tell you she's been given too much credit for her accomplishments. Many would tell you otherwise. Those who have sat in her classroom and been directed by her on stage; the fellow arts enthusiasts who have been inspired by her vision and "joie de vivre" all agree: this is one remarkable woman.

Roberta Peacock Gamble, better known as "Miss" Bobbie, was chosen as *The Greenville Advocate* Citizen of the Year for 2007. In 2006, the stage of the Ritz Theatre in Greenville—a theater that would "likely be a parking lot" without Roberta Gamble, her fans say—was named in her honor during her surprise 80th birthday gala. She served what she describes as 12 "wonderful, life-changing" years on the board of the Alabama State Council for the Arts.

This year, Gamble has been chosen to receive the Johnnie Dee Riley Little Lifetime Achievement Award from the Alabama State



Photo by Sharon Hefflin

Gamble's love of dogs and language led her to link up with former student and long-time friend, Priscilla Davis, a noted photographer, to create the delightful and well-received book, "Southern Dogs."

Council for the Arts. The Florida native, born to Scots immigrants and raised in Lakeland during the depths of the Great Depression, learned to love all things artistic at an early age. "My mother was interested in theater, music and dance. In spite of those difficult times, we took lessons in tap dance, piano and what they called 'elocution' back in the day," Gamble recalls. "Where my parents came up with the 75 cents a week it must have cost for those

lessons, I don't know." Her earliest stage memories go back to Central Avenue Grammar School. "It was 1931, and I played 'Dawn Delight, Queen of the Fairies,'" Gamble remembers with an impish smile.

The Peacocks also put on their own productions, with Mrs. Peacock making the costumes and the children creating their own props. Later, at Robert E. Lee High School in Jacksonville, Gamble served as student director of her senior play. The 17-year-old high school grad,

truly bitten by the acting bug, left Florida to come to the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa to study speech and theater. "I had lots of marvelous roles those first two years," she recalls. "Unfortunately, I ended up having to take all my required courses my junior and senior years, which meant I had to stop being on stage so much."

A member of the National Collegiate Players, Gamble played



Gamble shares a triumphant moment with husband Arthur "Bub" Gamble, following his victory at a Greenville Country Club tournament in the 1950s.

the lead in "Antigone" during her college days. She also served as a graduate assistant in Alabama's speech and theater department. The striking, dark-eyed brunette envisioned a glittering career on the Great White Way. Instead, courtship and marriage to a Greenville native, retired Circuit Judge Arthur "Bub" Gamble, brought her to the small south Alabama town she has called home for nearly 60 years—a town without much of a theatrical history.

In her early years in Greenville, Gamble did some social work; however, according to a former co-worker, most of the soft-hearted Gamble's salary went to items needed by her clients. She also hosted a local radio show, "Betsy Camp Calling," chatting with housewives who had gotten

their husbands and children off to work and school. Gamble's primary focus, she says, was caring for the couple's only child, Eugenia (Genie). "My daughter had a lot of health problems as a child, and I certainly wanted to be there for her. I'd have to say I've had a bit of a 'checkered career,'" Gamble says with a wry smile. Gamble eventually went to Troy State University and obtained a teaching certificate, becoming a history teacher at Greenville High School.

"There was no drama department at the high school when I first started teaching. We had some marvelous senior plays, but they were

directed by other people, not by me," Gamble recalls.

"In the early '60s, I was teaching history all day long—and directing beauty pageants."

She may not have actually been teaching drama, but Gamble certainly had a dramatic effect on her history pupils. "I never really liked history until I took Miss Bobbie's class," former history and drama student Sara Killough Torruella of Foley recalls. "She made the subject come to life for us. Reading the poignant story of Rachel and Andrew Jackson aloud to us was just one way Miss Bobbie enlivened the topic." By the late 1960s, speech and drama had been incorporated into the GHS curriculum, and added to Gamble's roster



Gamble poses with an exuberant group of her Greenville High School students from the early '80s. During her time at the school, she directed 17 plays and musicals and hundreds of scenes for drama festivals.

of classes. By then, public schools in Alabama had undergone a dramatic change—integration. Gamble says she has never been an overtly political person. Nevertheless, the teacher, whose husband prosecuted civil rights cases as a district attorney during the turbulent '60s, says she believes support of public education and integration “was the right thing to do.”

She proved it in her actions as she put on the first integrated stage production in the city, the musical “Hello, Dolly!” in 1970. “I did not realize it at the time, but Miss Bobbie was teaching us great life lessons that went far beyond the stage production experience,” says Gamble’s former student Nancy Miller Idland, executive director of the Greenville Area Arts Council. “By bringing black and white students together and demanding the very best that each of us had to offer, she was teaching us we could achieve great things by working together.” Gamble recalls watching with pride as students from all walks of life came together to paint props, work on scenery and grab a sandwich together. “It was just a beautiful thing to see them all, black and white, working together and having a good time. Thank goodness we had forward-thinking administrators who saw what theater could do for students, male and female, black and white alike.” Gamble’s efforts inspired some students to do more than they ever thought they could.

“Imagine a quiet, shy bookish girl like me—actually singing, dancing on and acting on stage in front of hundreds of people,” Torruella, who performed in the chorus of the early '70s production of “Oklahoma,” marvels.

Frank Phelps, who played Emile DeBecque in Gamble’s 1985 production of “South Pacific,” says this of his teacher and director: “The dictionary describes a mentor as a ‘wise, loyal advisor,’ but for someone like Miss Bobbie, that doesn’t even begin to fill the bill. She would put on a show with 80 or 90 people involved...what



A radiant Gamble poses in her Greenville High School classroom in 1982.

Photo courtesy of Roberta Gamble

Miss Bobbie did with high school kids was phenomenal.”

From “Hello, Dolly!” to the “The Sound of Music,” from “Oklahoma!” to “Annie, Get Your Gun” and many other shows,



Gamble is surrounded by the young cast members of “Urban Cowboy” during the after-show reception of the Greenville Area Arts Council production in February 2007. The Greenville Area Arts Council, for which “Miss Bobbie” has been a guiding light, is in its 25th year bringing quality productions to small-town Alabama.

Photo by Angie Long

Gamble directed her Old Gym Players at GHS in many memorable performances, not to mention making a 16 mm comic silent movie and guiding her students through “hundreds of individual scenes” for drama festivals along the way. Browse through Gamble’s old photos of her directing days, and you will notice something frequently missing—

mayor, looks back to the early ‘80s, recalling a small band of arts supporters searching for a home for such a theater.

The Ritz Theatre downtown, once a stylish Art Deco movie house, had been closed for several years by then. Nothing was playing on its stage “except rats, pigeons and roaches,” Kennedy says. “I think

people thought we had lost our minds. The place was an absolute wreck.” Gamble, Kennedy and crew saw the possibilities beneath the cobwebs and dust and persevered. Even before an arts council was officially formed, future members could be found investing sweat equity in fixing up the “uninhabitable” building. After the city purchased the theater in 1982, the new Greenville Area Arts Council truly kicked

into high gear, preparing for the Alabama Shakespeare’s touring production of “Romeo and Juliet” a scant three months later. “We taped up those seats with the springs shooting through and went on with the show,” Gamble laughs. Kennedy calls his friend the “steamroller who begged and cajoled and pushed to get the money and supplies we needed to give us the ‘new’ Ritz Theatre.” Twenty-five years later, those efforts have certainly paid off.

Over the years, the Ritz’s original, vibrant Art Deco décor has been restored, its stage enlarged and new dressing rooms added. New heating and cooling and new seating were installed. Reception and conference rooms and additional restrooms now flank the theater as part of the Ritz complex.

The theater is home to several quality GAAC productions each year, featuring shows normally only seen in much larger venues. This spring, the GAAC is putting on an all-singing, all-dancing musical fundraiser showcasing local talent. Idland is directing the show, but says she is looking to her beloved mentor Miss Bobbie to show her the way. “Miss Bobbie is designing the costumes for this show and doing a fabulous job. Even in her 80s, her enthusiasm and leadership is alive and well,” says Idland. “Miss Bobbie is the reason there is a GAAC. Hundreds of people have benefited from her constant commitment to bringing the arts into our community.”

*Angie Long is an award-winning
Lifestyles reporter
for The Greenville Advocate
and a member
of the Greenville Area
Arts Council.*



Photo by Alvin Benn

In March 2006, Gamble was honored with a surprise 80th birthday gala at the Ritz Theatre. A show was mounted with many former drama students and GAAC members singing, clowning and sharing their love for “Miss” Bobbie. A fabulous cake re-created the exterior of the Ritz and featured signs from the many shows she put on in Greenville.

Gamble. “I was usually in the balcony working the spotlight. It saved on hiring someone else to do it, and I wanted to keep the focus on the kids. I wanted it to be their time to shine,” Gamble says with a shrug. Even as she was directing students in top-notch productions that drew attendees from other cities, Gamble was dreaming of an arts council and a community theater in Greenville.

Charlie Kennedy, a noted Greenville musician and former

THE DISTINGUISHED ARTIST AWARD

Nall

An Artist's Pilgrimage

by Jeanie Thompson

From the Mobile Museum of Art to the newly-opened Troy Cultural Arts Center, from the harbor of the Principality of Monaco to the sacred Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, Nall, honored as the 2007 Distinguished Alabama Artist, has made his mark in a singular way.

A multi-talented fine artist, Nall has traveled the world, studying diverse cultures and exploring art, architecture and indigenous craft. Although classically trained, Nall is not a conventional artist who follows tradition regarding the use of media, style or subject. Always a seeker, he has followed his own path which has led him to remote locations in North Africa, India, the Middle East, South America and Mexico, but brought him back to his roots in Alabama.

Nall has contributed to projects all over the world. After H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco saw Nall's mosaic work, he commissioned Nall to create two monumental flower mosaics for the Grimaldi



Photo courtesy of Nall

Nall has traveled the world studying diverse cultures and exploring art of the body and spirit. His latest projects have taken him to the home of Giacomo Puccini and the sacred Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi.

Forum in Monte Carlo. These two large-scale works were featured on official Monaco postage stamps in December 2005. Also, under the High Patronage of H.S.H. Prince Albert II, Nall has seen his work installed in the Monaco Cathedral and above the Monaco harbor, situated next to the Theater Princess Grace. Nall's work is in numerous

museums and private collections worldwide, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which acquired several of Nall's line engravings for their permanent collection, and the Musée des Beaux Arts, Nice.

But one must look beyond this artist's impressive biography to find the essence of Nall, an artist and an Alabamian who is fueled by a personal quest. Nall would like the world to know that Alabama, his home state and a place known as the cradle of the Civil Rights Movement, produces some of the richest artistic and intellectual talent in the world.

Like many young pilgrims, Nall had to first leave his controversial home to find it. Born in Troy, Alabama, in 1948, Nall, graduated from the University of Alabama in 1970, fled the state, and took up residence in Paris to study the great art of Europe. Unable to speak French, Nall auditioned for and was admitted to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and later was an apprentice of Symbolist painter Salvador Dali, who advised him to "Draw from life, draw again and again..." He financed his life and



Photo courtesy of Nall

H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco and Nall cut the ribbon of the monumental bronze Peace Frame in September 2006.



Photo courtesy of Nall

From the book, Alabama Art, Nall juggling twelve Alabama artists.

education in Europe with return trips home in the summers to paint and sell his work. His career as a painter and master engraver flourished and he published many of his engravings.

By the early 1990's Nall had purchased the studio of Jean Dubuffet in Vence, where he later met and married his wife Tuscia. Envisioning a place where artists might live and work near the French Riviera, Nall and Tuscia purchased the grounds of the former Karoly Foundation, and transformed it into the N.A.L.L. (Nall Art and Life League) Foundation as a haven for artists, writers and musicians. In 1997 Nall opened his museum at the Foundation, which includes a studio, living quarters and grounds.

Imbued with a strong work ethic and the desire to pass it on,

Nall invites apprentices to spend time at the N.A.L.L. Foundation. Proceeds from Nall's various projects help finance the opportunity for young artists, many from the South, to apprentice with Nall in Vence.

In 2000 Nall launched a project he christened "Alabama Art" which started as a way for him to show his French friends and neighbors a bit about his home state. After gathering a core of photographers including Kathryn Tucker Windham and Chip Cooper, he was encouraged by others in Alabama arts to include more artists. The group show of 13 featured both fine and outsider artists, with familiar Alabama names like Frank Fleming, Clifton Pearson, Yvonne Wells, Charlie Lucas, and Jimmy Lee Sudduth.

Alabama Art debuted in the perched village of Tourrette Sur Loup, France, a few miles from Vence, in the summer of 2000. *Alabama Art*, published by Black Belt Press, won the Mary Ellen Lopresti ARLIS/Southeast Publishing Award for "Best Art Book" in the Southeastern USA. The phenomenon of *Alabama Art* took on a life of its own, traveling to other venues in Alabama under the auspices of Troy University.

In 2005, Nall and Dr. David Bronner, Chief Executive Officer of the Retirement Systems of Alabama (RSA), conspired to take the vision of *Alabama Art* to New York City. Dr. Bronner invited Nall to bring the entire *Alabama Art* 2000 exhibition to 55 Water Street, a Manhattan financial district building

owned by RSA. During a gala evening, Alabama artists and writers, state dignitaries, and a host of Alabama and New York friends enjoyed an evening of Alabama Art.

A concurrent retrospective exhibition of Nall's work at the National Arts Club included finely detailed drawings from his early *Alice in Wonderland* series, botanical paintings and prints, complex mosaics, graphite portraits encased in elaborate frames, intricate line engravings and watercolors. For the opening night event at the National Arts Club, Nall and Tuscia hosted a recital featuring Puccini Festival musicians who performed selections from *La Fanciulla del West*, and revealed a glimpse of Nall's upcoming costumes for Puccini's "American Opera."

La Fanciulla Del West represented perhaps the most challenging commission of Nall's life to that point. At the request of the Puccini Festival in Torre de Lago Puccini, Tuscany, Italy, Nall designed sets and costumes for the Festival's 2005 production of *La Fanciulla Del West* for the 51st season.

Soon after, Nall was introduced to Father Vincenzo Coli, the head of the Franciscan Monks in Assisi, Umbria. After viewing and being moved by Nall's etchings and earlier works, Father Coli stated that he believed the Alabama artist understood the "wounds of humanity" and was therefore an appropriate artist to create liturgical work for Assisi. Nall then created the monumental



Photo courtesy of Nall

The Puccini Festival located in Torre de Lago Puccini, Tuscany, Italy, commissioned Nall to design sets and costumes for La Fanciulla del West (The Girl of the Golden West), known as Puccini's "American opera," in Summer 2005. Nall was the first American to be invited to participate in Sculpting the Opera.

bronzes and icons making use of earlier works on paper that made up what came to be called *Violata Pax*, or *Wounded Peace*, which would be

exhibited for hundreds of thousands of Assisi pilgrims.

Violata Pax was on view from May - August 2006 at the Basilica of



Photo courtesy of Nall

Nall's massive retrospective Alchemy, a 400-page book with text by Hugues de la Touche published in summer 2006, is the most complete compendium of his life and work to date, documenting his work from early Paris student days to the present.

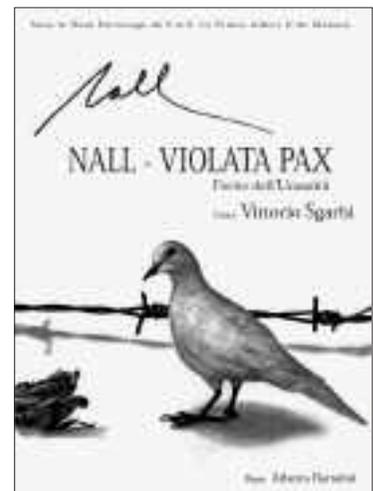


Photo courtesy of Nall

An elegant, large format art book called simply Nall—Violata Pax, documents the conception, design and installation of Violata Pax, Nall's major liturgical work installed in the sacred Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi; in the Cathedral of Monaco; in Menton, France; in Pietrasanta, Tuscany, Italy, and finally in Mobile, Alabama.

St. Francis of Assisi. At the same time, a set of the monumental works were installed in the piazza of Piestrasanta, Tuscany, Italy, with Nall's work filling the adjacent Duomo Agostino. Further, a retrospective exhibition in Menton, France, and an installation of *Violata Pax* icons in the Monaco Cathedral, completed the summer pilgrimage of Nall's work.

To commemorate this work a large format art book about *Violata Pax*'s genesis was produced, and *Alchemy*, a scrapbook of Nall's more than 30-year career, was also published. In August 2006, *Violata Pax*, with a new monumental bronze called "Bible Belt," Alabama Art and other works were exhibited at the Mobile Museum of Art.

In order to promote the 2007 Puccini Festival season and Nall's participation designing sets and costumes for the maestro's *La Rondine*, the monumental bronze dove and frame were recently installed at the Pisa airport, the hub through which many festival-goers arrive. Travelers to Pisa Airport find the *Violata Pax* monumental dove and frame in the grassy courtyard, with images from Nall's interpretation of Puccini's Opera—in the airport interior. This summer during the opera festival season, the city of Piestrasanta will dedicate a square where one of Nall's monumental frames will permanently reside.

While his European associations continue to grow, Nall has plowed new ground back in the



Photo courtesy of Nall

The monumental bronze dove representing "wounded peace," or Violata Pax, was installed in the upper Basilica in Assisi in spring 2006 at the invitation of Father Vincenzo Coli, head of the Franciscan Monks. Nall's giant dove has part of her face blown away and one foot is deformed—symbolizing the wounds of humanity embodied in one creature of nature.



Photo courtesy of Nall

Icons from Violata Pax were recently installed in the Pisa, Italy airport to publicize Nall's 2007 season collaboration with the Puccini Festival.

USA. In early 2007 Nall spent two months in Miami as a featured artist during the Art Basel and Miami Art Fair, represented by Westwood Galleries of New York, NY. He was Artist in Residence at Miami Dade Community College, the country's largest community college, and had work installed in five locations of the college.

No matter where he travels in the world, Nall takes Alabama with him. In this way, Alabama's indigenous artistic talent becomes better known and opportunities may be created for other artists to work abroad. In the coming year, young musicians and artists from Alabama will travel to study with the Puccini Festival master teachers and the artisans of Pietrasanta. In exchange, Puccini Festival performers are expected to tour Alabama performing arts venues.

Why would an artist of immense talent and unprecedented drive extend his energies to promote his fellow artists abroad and at home? The reason probably lies in the fact that Nall is an omnivorous consumer of human energy and love. His own art feeds upon this energy, and he gives back tenfold to all who surround him.

Thankfully, Nall can always come home—to Alabama—again. He and Tuscia maintain a residence in Fairhope where he has a private studio. They travel with their beloved dogs Shorty and Rosina, between Vence, Monaco and Fairhope, continuing their pilgrimage



Photo courtesy of Nall

The icon called "Genocide" poignantly evokes the wounds of humanity that Father Coli saw in Nall's drawings. Originally created for the Italian commemoration of La Shoa in 2005, "Genocide" references man's ultimate inhumanity to man. Barbed wire from concentration camps, a cup of water that the thirsty prisoner desires, and human skulls in the border all touch us with their veracity. St. Francis is depicted at the top of the icon, interceding to request forgiveness for humanity's sins.

During the summer of 2006, Nall's two monumental bronzes were installed in the Piazza of the Duomo Santo Agostino in Pietrasanta, Tuscany, Italy. Here, the giant Peace Frame, embellished with symbols and mosaic work, frames another edition of Nall's dove of "wounded peace."



Photo by Jeanie Thompson



A generous, public man in many ways, Nall craves moments of introspection and nurturance provided by his family and his homes in Europe and Alabama. Four-legged friends Shorty and Rosina travel extensively with Nall and Tuscia who raise money for homeless animals as part of their many charitable endeavors. This spring Nall and Tuscia are sponsoring the Blessing of the Animals in the Cathedral of Monaco with a sacred music concert, proceeds from which go to aid the children of Darfur.

to new venues for Nall's artistic vision. When they are not mounting new shows or researching materials for his art, Tuscia and Nall participate in charitable events such as the Sacred Music Festival of the Monaco Cathedral and auctions to raise funds for animal shelters in Vence.

Even as an honoree in the 2007 Governor's Arts Awards, Nall encompasses a vast amount of human energy and enterprise. Speaking from his studio in Vence, Nall mused about what it means to receive the Distinguished Artist Award during the Year of Alabama Arts. "I think this award certainly has been won not just by me but by all my friends and supporters," he said.

"I want to accept it for all the people I've worked with throughout my career—all the museums, galleries, clients, the Jack Warners, the Red Blounts, the Mobile Museum of Art, the Huntsville Museum, the Birmingham Museum of Art, the Montgomery Museum of Fine Art. And I want to accept it for all the other artists who were part of Alabama Art. I proudly receive it for all of my artist friends and all the other friends and associates who have been with me in my career."

Jeanie Thompson is executive director of the Alabama Writers' Form and a faculty member of the Spalding University Brief Residency MFA Writing Program (Louisville, KY)

Material from Westwood Gallery's website was used with permission for this article.

THE GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARD

Kathy Chan

A Lifetime of Artistic and Philanthropic Achievements

by Dr. Wilson Luquire



“Carpe Diem, Seize the Day. This is my philosophy about life. I believe it also applies to civic and community work. One should live fully, work hard, and help

wholeheartedly in whatever they believe in.”—Kathy Chan, 2007.

Linguist, artist, musician, dancer, fashion designer, humanitarian, international jeweler, world

traveler, gourmet cook, volunteer, organizer, instigator, and philanthropist are but a few of the words that could be used to describe Kathy Chan. She is both an artist who has produced numerous creations in several genres for the world's stage, as well as being a major philanthropist providing millions of dollars to various worthy causes, including education/scholarships, cultural and artistic gifts, and human services gifts. Her contributions over the years have been so numerous that only a few select highlights can be presented in this article.

Kathy Chan was born in Shanghai, China. Her family immigrated to Brazil when she was only nine years old. As a teenager in Brazil, Kathy met her husband Tony. At that time, he was a London college graduate on holiday in Brazil. Tony soon returned to England to pursue his doctorate degree. Kathy dropped out of her high school and followed him to England, claiming she needed to perfect her English. Before long, the two were married and their first son was born in England. From England, the two moved to Turkey. It was there that their second child, a daughter, was born.



Photo courtesy of Kathy Chan

Kathy Chan painting in her studio.



Kathy Chan at the University of Alabama in Huntsville's 25 Anniversary.

Following Turkey, Tony and Kathy moved to California, where Tony taught at the University of California. In San Diego, Kathy obtained her GED allowing her later to attend Purdue University. While living in California, their third child, a son, was born.

In 1970, Tony and Kathy moved for the last time, and came to Huntsville. After seeing her children off to school, Kathy enrolled at the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) and earned two degrees, one in French and a second in Fine Art. Utilizing her artistic instinct, Kathy taught herself how to make fine jewelry. Within five years, she won her first of many international awards for jewelry design. Kathy, her husband Tony and their Pei-Ling Chan Charitable Trust have made many remarkable contributions to society, providing literally millions of dollars to scholarships, university programs, civic programs, education programs, and other cultural and humanitarian programs.

Kathy elaborates on how her background has helped to shape her artwork: "Since childhood, I have lived in many different countries, and for this reason my jewelry has a multi-cultural flavor. When I design, sometimes I simply extract only the essence of a form—an oriental influence, or sometimes the design is very colorful—a South American influence, other designs are very stylish—a European influence. The past also inspires my work at times. I love to create works with granulation, an Etruscan influence. It accents my jewelry design, and is a modern twist on an ancient technique."

Kathy has managed to make quite a name for herself, despite relatively little formal training in the field of jewelry design. As she says, "My experience with jewelry designing comes from experiments and natural instinct. I am a self-taught artist in the field; but in many ways, not having a formal training has been an advantage for me. The horizon is wide and there are no limits in my mind about what I am able to do. I am very involved with my designs from the time of conception to production, and even marketing. I have a real passion for jewelry making from start to finish. For this reason, each piece has a life



Kathy Chan's first International Award-winning jewelry piece from 1986: a topaz, pearl, diamond and gold pendant-necklace, which transforms easily into five different necklaces and three different brooches.

of its own, whether it is a very intricately detailed design or just a simple, bold one.”

Her prominence on the world’s jewelry stage is evidenced by the numerous citations and awards that she has received for many, many years in competitions and cities all over the world. She has received dozens of prestigious awards which have covered three decades. Among them are 14 International Award Winning entries, which include her work as an artist working with precious metals, pearls and gemstones. These 14 Award Winning Pieces will be included in a 2007 exhibit entitled “The World of Kathy Chan” at the Mary G. Hardin Center for Cultural Arts in Gadsden, Alabama. This exhibit will also feature several other jewelry creations, paintings, and dresses designed by Kathy Chan.

Kathy Chan’s work is full of symbolism and meaning. She has created several pieces to commemorate various historical events including the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion of 1986, the Reaching out for Democracy “Tiananmen Square Event” of 1989, the California Earthquake of 1989, the Huntsville Tornado of 1989, and the Persian Gulf War of 1991. According to Kathy, “In this short lifetime of ours, it is important to me to leave an impression and do something positive. Consequently, my designs are filled with symbolism, purpose, and meaning. My goal has always been to make my unusual creations as strong and as flawless as possible, while at the same time making a quiet and elegant statement to the beholder. I strive to achieve among my design concepts a harmonic balance of comfort and high quality with durable precious materials and impeccable workmanship”.



Kathy Chan models one of her creations, a metallic fabric dress, at a fundraiser for the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra, holding an emu egg adorned with South Sea pearls, jade, and citrine.

Photo courtesy of Kathy Chan

Kathy Chan’s artistic creativity knows no bounds. As she says, “People often ask me if I simply dream up my designs. Actually, the answer is “no!” I find inspiration for my creations from all of my surroundings, everyday. Every waking second brings a deluge of new ideas to my mind. Whether it is the softest whisper of the wind or an enormous earthquake, a fresh flower in bloom or a busy bumble-bee working, nature provides me with endless inspiration. As long as I am able, I hope to continue to transform these inspirational

wonders into beautifully crafted and jeweled pieces of fine art.” Kathy continues, “Just like a poet or a writer, I am also encouraged by everyday happenings. Instead of recording history in writing, I record history with the expressions of my jewelry. All my jewelry creations are breathtakingly beautiful, and some include a very deep symbolism and philosophy about life.”

Kathy has been and continues to be involved extensively in Huntsville civic activities and has received several “Volunteer of the Year” awards. She initiated the Chinese school for children in Huntsville, designed the logo for the Huntsville Arts Council, and has helped organize and support charitable events for many non-profit organiza-



International Award-winning Black South Sea pearl, diamond and seed pearl brooch by Kathy Chan. This design was the only American winner in 1991.

Photo courtesy of Kathy Chan



Tony and Kathy Chan with Yo-Yo Ma in Huntsville, 2005.

tions, including the Huntsville Museum of Art, the Huntsville Botanical Garden, the Huntsville Symphony, the Huntsville Hospital Foundation, the Huntsville Chamber Music Guild, the University of Alabama in Huntsville, the Mary G. Hardin Center for Cultural Arts in Gadsden, the Savannah College of Art and Design (Savannah, Georgia), Hospice of North Alabama, the American Red Cross, the Constitution Village Park, and many other organizations too numerous to mention.

Her history of community involvement is quite extensive. In 1986, she designed and constructed the set for the Grand Finale of the Armed Forces Celebration "Partners in Peace." The friendship bridge that was a part of the set was used by Bob Hope in celebration of his 80th birthday. On June 11 and 12, 1989, Kathy supported and guided Chinese students in a march in Washington D.C. to demonstrate against bloodshed and oppression in China. In 1993-1994, she provided interest, money, and support for the Police Department to be able to buy back

literally hundreds of guns, which, without her support, would still threaten us all. When she learned that the Police Department was out of money to buy back more available guns, she immediately provided the buy-back money.

Around this same time, Kathy created a sculpture in honor of UAH's 25 years of autonomy, and received the UAH Outstanding Alumna of the Year Award. In 1998, she participated in the "Behind Bars For Good"



Photo courtesy of Kathy Chan

Kathy Chan appears on the cover of Bliss Magazine in 2003.

Muscular Dystrophy Association fundraiser. The National Conference of Community and Justice honored Kathy for her race-relations work in 1999. This same year, she again donated \$10,000 to support the Guns for Life gun buyback program in Huntsville.

Kathy Chan's artistic and philanthropic works continue into the

current decade. In 2001, she provided three unique works of jewelry to be displayed at the UAH Salmon Library. In 2002, she was named an Alumni of Achievement by UAH, and helped sponsor a performance of the Shanghai Ballet. *Bliss Magazine* featured Kathy on its cover in 2003. This same year, she also donated a \$6,000 necklace to be raffled in benefit of the Huntsville Museum of Art, and was awarded a certificate from the Huntsville International Cultural Organization. In 2004, Kathy designed a pin given to members of the Millennium Society of Huntsville Hospital. Kathy and her husband Tony sponsored a concert in Huntsville featuring superstar cellist Yo-Yo Ma the following year. In 2006, they were both recognized for donating \$100,000 to the Gadsden Cultural Arts Foundation. In March 2007, the opera Lucia di Lammermoor was performed in honor of Kathy Chan, along with an auction of her work. Clearly, Kathy Chan is a very deserving recipient of this award, and her works will surely continue to benefit North Alabama and the world for years to come.

*Dr. Wilson Luquire
Dean of the Library
University of Alabama
in Huntsville*



Thomas Hinds

A Commitment to Community Music Making

by Dr. Mark Benson

In an age when we read all too often about reduced support for the arts and failed orchestras, the story of the Montgomery Symphony Orchestra qualifies as a genuine success. Newcomers to the orchestra's concerts are often surprised to learn that the ensemble is a community orchestra, comprised primarily of volunteers, rather than professional players. The level of playing far exceeds the standards of most community orchestras in the country because of the commitment Music Director Thomas Hinds has made to the orchestra, and the commitment to music making he has inspired in its members.

Born in Oklahoma and raised in Minnesota and North Carolina, it was not at all obvious that Thomas Hinds was destined for a career as an orchestral conductor. "My parents were musical," he says, "but they didn't listen to much classical music. They sang in the choir and loved to listen to jazz. They taught my brothers and me how to sing when we were very young, and trotted us out to entertain guests." In sixth grade, Hinds heard his first live orchestra performance when the North Carolina Symphony gave a young person's concert at his school.



Maestro Thomas Hinds prepared to lead the Montgomery Symphony Orchestra.

Photo by David Robertson, Jr.



Photo by David Robertson, Jr.

Rehearsal for Broadway Under the Stars, a free outdoor concert held on the grounds of the Blount Cultural Park at Summer's end.

“I knew then that classical music was something I wanted to learn,” he recalls. Later, Hinds learned the trumpet—“in order to play like Harry James”—and also the bassoon, the orchestral instrument that would become his major instrument in college.

In 1966, Hinds enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to major in physics. He explains, “My father was an engineer and my mother was a pilot, so it seemed natural to major in science. Eventually I realized that my real love was music, and that I had better give it a try while I was still young enough to pursue it. My parents were horrified when I announced that I had changed my major, but they eventually got used to the idea.” After graduating, Hinds spent a few years as a free-lance musician, but in 1972 he won an audition for a bassoon position with the Alabama

Symphony Orchestra, with whom he performed for the next ten years. Midway through his tenure with the orchestra, he began to investigate seriously the possibility of becoming a conductor.

“With a pristine ignorance about how to go about it,” Hinds says, “I began to explore everything that might be useful in a conducting position. At one time or another, I volunteered to be music librarian for a ballet company; orchestra contractor, backstage chorus director and general gofer for an opera company; and technical assistant with the Alabama Symphony. I even drove the technical truck when the orchestra went on tour.” He also began studying with noted conducting teachers, including Charles Bruck at the Pierre Monteux Domaine School in Maine, and Harold Farberman at the American Conductor’s Guild Institute. In 1981, he studied with

noted conductor Sergiu Celibidache at the prestigious Munich Philharmonic Conductor’s Course. Eventually, he earned conducting engagements with Birmingham’s Red Mountain Chamber Orchestra, Johnson City (Tennessee) Symphony, the Southern Regional Opera Company, and the Birmingham Civic Opera.

Thomas Hinds was named music director and conductor of the Montgomery Symphony Orchestra in 1983. Only seven years old at the time, the orchestra was still trying to find its identity. “We wanted to build an orchestra that represented the people of Montgomery,” says Hinds, “and it was decided not to move toward a fully professional orchestra, but to keep the ensemble a volunteer organization.” Helen Steineker, the Symphony’s long-time manager comments, “We knew it would be a slower road, artistically,

but Tom's expertise on the podium brought out better music each year."

Hinds also had some ideas about how to speed up the process of making the orchestra better. First, the Orchestra initiated a scholarship program to assist its players in paying for private lessons. Second, a Youth Orchestra was created, offering the opportunity for high school-age players to perform symphonic music. The Montgomery Symphony currently includes several "graduates" of that orchestra.

It was Hinds who suggested the Symphony's Fellowship program, in which national auditions are held each year to select a young, professional violinist or cellist to be the orchestra's principle players. "I wanted our community to hear how music sounded when played at a very high level," he remarks. It was also his belief that young professionals leading the string sections would lead by example and instruction, and inspire a commitment to excellence in performance among the orchestra's members. This is exactly what has happened. In addition, each the Symphony's Fellows are featured every year in a solo performance with the orchestra, and in three solo recitals.

"We knew we could offer young professionals things that full-time orchestras couldn't. Since our rehearsal schedule is relatively light, they have time to practice and travel to other important events and competitions. And we could provide them with regular solo performance

opportunities—exactly what a young professional musician needs." Thus the Fellowship program has benefited many young professional players, most of whom have gone on to careers as professional musicians and teachers in the United States or abroad. In return, the Fellows have given Montgomery audiences high quality performances, greatly enriching the cultural climate of the city.

Hinds is the first to admit that successes of this kind are not completely his own doing. "I work with a Board of Directors that is the envy of my conductor colleagues," he says. Steineker adds, "Tom and the board have always been on the same page. They look at the orchestra and its mission and they see the same thing." Hinds prefers to ask questions and pose suggestions rather than make demands, and his self-effacing personality has endeared him to board members and audiences alike.

An attitude of cooperation is also evident in the relationship between Hinds and the orchestra's members. Hinds sees music making as a collaborative venture. His manner in rehearsals is that of a teacher who suggests ways to improve, and who guides players through the process of getting things right. He is quick to praise a job well done, whether in concerts or rehearsals. It is this atmosphere of shared music making that brings 70 volunteers back to rehearsal week after week, season after season.

The spirit of cooperation between the conductor, the board,



Thomas Hinds perfecting each note.

Photo by David Robertson, Jr.



Thomas setting the intensity and mood.

Photo by David Robertson, Jr.



Thomas Hinds conducting the Montgomery Symphony at the free outdoor pops concert on the grounds of the Alabama Archives and History building.

and the orchestra's members has led to many successful artistic endeavors. A performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in 1994 involved 285 instrumentalists and singers in the most ambitious musical performance in Montgomery's history. The annual "Broadway under the Stars" pops concert brings thousands of River Region music lovers to a free outdoor concert on the grounds of the Blount Cultural Park each year. The Orchestra's Blount-Slawson Young Artists competition is one of the most prestigious competitions for teenage performers in the United States.

Success in Montgomery has led to other opportunities for Hinds. In 1992, he was named the very first conductor of the Gadsden Symphony Orchestra, a post he held concurrently with the one in Montgomery for several years. He has been invited to conduct the Ft. Worth Civic Orchestra, the Queensland (Australia) Conservatory Orchestra, and many others. Most recently he was musical director for the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's highly acclaimed productions of *Man of La Mancha* and *Beauty and the Beast*.

Despite the many opportunities that come his way, Hinds remains devoted to the Montgomery Symphony. "It's the people," he says. "How can you not love to come to work with players who give so unselfishly of their time in order to make music?" His motivation is the same today as when he first took the position nearly twenty-five years ago: "When I first heard the orchestra, I knew there was the potential for playing great music, and I wanted to be the one to bring it out." He still gets more satisfaction in the orchestra's achievements than he does in the applause he receives for himself. "My most rewarding moments are probably not the same ones our audience might expect," he says. "I remember the concert on which we played Gustav Mahler's Fourth Symphony and Maurice Ravel's *Scheherazade*, and thinking 'this sound is the right one for Mahler,' and 'this is the way to play Ravel.' I remember the concert when I realized that the orchestra now knows how to play Beethoven, and the rehearsal when the orchestra achieved the perfect sound for Debussy."

"I know that my real legacy is the Montgomery Symphony Orchestra," explains Hinds. "I think we've created a heritage of community music making in Montgomery. A heritage is not only what we've been given, but what we hand down, and it makes me happy to see sons and daughters of symphony members continue the tradition, playing in our orchestra."

Thomas Hinds will receive a Governor's Arts Award this May for the musical legacy he is still in the process of creating. He is grateful for the recognition, and even more grateful for the opportunities he has received: "The people of Alabama gave me the opportunity to do the thing I really wanted to do with my life, and for that I can never thank them enough." Congratulations, Tom, on receiving an award richly deserved.

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Paul Looney

Thriving on the Creation of Dreams

by Mark Hughes Cobb

Even though Paul K. Looney's hair is thinning, it's tempting to crawl slowly over the skull growing out of that thicket just to see if he possesses more eyes than the norm.

Because this one head, nearly throbbing with animation as it is, doesn't seem wide enough for the scope of his vision.

When he paints, figures in vivid hues sprawl across canvases larger than life; larger than some people's walls, as he found when trying to give his outsized works homes.

When he designs for a show, the sets soar up to the rafters and out to the wings, suggesting they live on outside the confines of the theater.

Where Looney sifted the soil of a burgeoning community theater, he saw a mighty oak.

Theatre Tuscaloosa, with the nurturing of Looney, with sweat, late nights and wrinkled foreheads, with cries for help—"Babes, our ox is in the ditch!"—and the ever-present urgent demand "Louder, faster, funnier!," grew from that vision into a



Paul Looney with his paintings at Kentuck Galley, in Tuscaloosa, November 1999.

Photo courtesy of The Tuscaloosa News

sprung from humble beginnings.

"If I had looked at the original board and told them we'd be where we are now, they would have laughed me out of the room," Looney said shortly after announcing his 2002 retirement from the organization.

"They used to laugh at me and my

acorns. But it's about possibility, thinking to the future; the idea that you're stable but you're growing, and you're going to be here for a long, long while."

Looney was there for a long, long while, from shortly after gaining his master's in directing at the University of Alabama in 1980, until 2002, when he became artistic director emeritus of the group, which by then had a permanent home, with theater, rehearsal spaces, offices, a shop and more, and the largest professional staff and season of any performing arts group in the area.

Looney often tells the tale of how he and the late Charlie Dennis, then manager of downtown



Paul and Susan Looney at the Bean-Brown Theatre at Shelton State, home of Theatre Tuscaloosa. Susan and Paul were featured in a series of stories on couples who worked together.

Tuscaloosa's Bama Theatre, where the group held most of its performances until 1998, shared a desk, sitting knee to knee and dreaming aloud about the future.

At the time, the TCP was struggling to put on one or two performances a year, with varying degrees of success. The Bama, originally a movie palace built in 1938, was slowly undergoing renovations, and even when niceties such as a working furnace were going, was never quite suited to the complexities of live theater.

Looney joined the staff in 1980, with a background in performing and directing for Birmingham's Town & Gown and UA's theater program. With his rich

baritone and expressive body language, he's been called on over the years to fill roles requiring over-the-top presences in shows such as "State Fair" and "Lend Me a Tenor," on those rare shows when he wasn't directing and designing.

As a director and producer, he kneaded actors, both trained and raw, into new shapes. He sought experts in music and costumes, and, with Dennis, designed and built many of the dazzling sets that first caught people's eyes to show them, in another Looney trademark phrase, that "this ain't amateur night in Dixie."

Building on the "town and gown" model, he drew on both UA and community talent. One of Looney's top go-to actors and directors

for almost two decades has been Paul B. Crook, now assistant professor of acting and directing at Louisiana Tech University School of the Performing Arts.

"Paul is crusty, ornery, fractious, loud, belligerent, opinionated—and those are his good points!," Crook said.

Seriously, Crook said passion is the word that most sums up Looney, whether in painting, directing, chatting with pals or watching a Crimson Tide basketball game.

"In a world full of those who go through the motions and become bogged down in the mundane repetition of their lives and work, Paul manages to attack and consume all that he does with an overwhelming passion," Crook said.



Paul Looney working on vocal harmonies with the Basically Broadway Singers, rehearsing for a performance at the Alabama Stage and Screen Hall of Fame, an event that he helped create.



Rebecca Tingle, Executive Director of the Tuscaloosa Dancers collaborated with Paul Looney on a production for the Nutcracker in November 2001. Paul taking a break during those rehearsals.



Backstage with Broadway star, Rebecca Luker at a performance of The Music Man in New York, March 2001.

Married for 40 years to Susan, a dancer and choreographer with whom he's worked on numerous shows and in the offices of Theatre Tuscaloosa (she's business manager), the Looneys made the group their child.

"They've babied it, disciplined it, fed it and it has grown into an exemplary organization," said Tina Fitch, who last year took over the job as executive producer of Theatre Tuscaloosa.

"Paul has some crazy ideas and approaches to the work, but no matter what, you never question that his concern is always for the health and well-being of this organization."

Paul and Susan Looney committed more than just their time to the group over the years, Fitch said, making investments more literal to keep it going, although they'd never admit that, she said.

"He has never blinked an eye in investing in its future," Fitch said.

Theatre Tuscaloosa has grown into the second-largest arts organization in Alabama, with a half-million dollar budget, said board president David Ford, because Looney engaged interest from all parts of the community, from wealthy arts supporters to powerful politicians to hard-nosed businessmen.

"Paul has essentially created this organization from nothing and taken it to a height that the board never dreamed was possible," Ford said.

In 1998, the group realized one of Looney's biggest dreams by mov-

ing into a permanent home at Shelton State Community College. Theatre Tuscaloosa had long been in partnership with the college, so when the new campus started going up, Looney drove fund-raising to build a theater and fine arts complex onto the building's south end.

(Looney proved so adept at fund-raising, that when he retired from Theatre Tuscaloosa he took over a new post as director of advancement for Shelton State. He's since retired from that job to devote full time to painting.)

Under Looney, the group added touring and outreach programs, including the professional Stage Centre Company, and the Second Stage program for developing actors and directors.

Looney also helped create the Alabama Stage and Screen Hall of Fame to honor the state's home-grown talent, from Tallulah Bankhead to Rebecca Luker to Jim "Gomer Pyle" Nabors.

A typical Theatre Tuscaloosa season now includes five or six main stage productions, with comedies, dramas and musicals in a mix designed to both please and challenge. He'd throw up a chestnut like "The Music Man" in hopes that audiences would let the glow carry over into an edgier work such as Stephen Sondheim's "Company."



Photo courtesy of The Tuscaloosa News

One of Paul Looney's last performances as an actor. Paul Looney with Nathan Gunter in State Fair. Afterwards, Paul focused his energies on directing plays.

And even though technically retired, he "ain't gone 10 toes up yet," still directing for the group. His most recent shows were this spring's "Amadeus" and Theatre Tuscaloosa's first world premiere, for the musical "A Dickens of a Carol" in December.

As he edged toward handing over the reigns—he'd brought in a professional staff of full-time shop, costume, box office and management people—Looney returned to his first love, even before Susan: painting. He's since had a couple of solo exhibits at the Kentuck Gallery, and taken sabbatical's at Nall Hollis' French countryside retreat.

Painting is, by nature, a private business, while theater is, by necessity, collaborative. He enjoys the solitude, but no one can doubt he thrives on the group dynamic.

And though he threatens with every new show that this will be his last, no one who knows him fears that he'll be able to stay out of the theater long, or that the echoes of "Hey babes!" will ever die down from the halls of the Bean-Brown Theatre, the house that Looney built.

Mark Hughes Cobb

Editor, Tusk Magazine

*Writer, Tuscaloosa News
and Tuscaloosa Magazine*

THE ALABAMA FOLK HERITAGE AWARD

Jerry McCain

Bluesman

by Anne Kimzey

The Alabama Folk Heritage Award, given every two years, is the state's highest honor for the folk and traditional arts. The 2007 recipient is blues musician and Gadsden native Jerry "Boogie" McCain. Born in 1930, McCain has played blues harmonica for more than 70 years. He is a true representative of the blues tradition in Alabama, or as he says it, "I am Jerry Boogie McCain. I ain't Coca-Cola, but I'm the real thing!"

McCain said that nobody is above the blues—that if you live long enough, you're going to get them. "The blues come from wanting, not getting; needing, not having. That's where the blues come from, see, blues is a feeling. And it's not just about a woman leaving a man or a man leaving a woman," he explained. Perhaps because he speaks the language of the blues so well, this harmonica master and songwriter has attracted fans world-



Photo by Steve Graubinger

Jerry McCain carries 16 harmonicas (several in each key) in his harmonica case.

wide. He has toured Europe several times, performs at national blues festivals and has been featured on the cover of *Living Blues* magazine.

In spite of national and international attention, only in more recent years has McCain gained recognition in his home state. He has performed regularly at Birmingham's City Stages festival where he received the Musical

Heritage Award in 1995 presented at the Alabama Sampler Stage. His hometown of Gadsden has also recognized McCain's contribution to the community's musical roots by featuring him in performance with the Etowah Youth Orchestra.

Jerry McCain earned the nickname "Boogie" when he began playing harmonica on the streets of Gadsden at the age of five. Several of his uncles played the harmonica, and his mother and aunt played guitar in the church, but his real musical influences were the blues musicians he heard on the jukebox at his father's barbecue stand when he was growing up in the 1930s and '40s. He

began imitating the sound of blues legends Sonny Boy Williamson and Sonny Terry. It was the music of Little Walter that inspired McCain to launch his own recording career.

He made his first commercial recording in 1953 on the Trumpet label in Jackson, Mississippi and has since recorded on a variety of labels, such as Excello, Rex, Okeh and Jewel. In the late 1980s and '90s he



This photo was taken for an overseas tour in the 1970s.

made several CDs with Ichiban Records and released *This Stuff Just Kills Me* in 2000 on Jericho. Most recently he worked with Music Maker Recordings to issue two CDs, *Unplugged* and *Boogie is My Name* on his own label, Boogiedown Records. He recorded his best-known song, “She’s Tough,” in 1960, which was covered by the Fabulous Thunderbirds.

Back in the early days of his career McCain traveled from town to town on what was known as the “chitlin’ circuit,” performing in juke joints all over the South, but always returning to Gadsden. All the while he was developing his own performing style. “I used to play like everybody. Sonny Boy Williamson, Jimmy Reed, Little Walter, Sonny Terry. Anybody that played harmonica,” said McCain. “Now I did that for years in the ’50s, in the ’60s, and then in the ’70s I started to changing my style.” Then in the ’80s, I got my own style.”

McCain said that all blues harmonica players had started sounding like to him, so he began modeling his harmonica breaks after the musical phrasing of jazz horn players and guitar players. “Most harmonica players don’t hit those licks,” he said.

In performance, he enjoys interacting with his fans, sometimes leaving the stage and moving through the crowd as he plays to individual audience members. Another crowd-pleasing technique he has perfected is playing the har-

Jerry McCain plays blues harmonica in an outdoor concert at Montgomery’s Old Alabama Town.



Photo by Steve Graubeger



Photo by Steve Graubinger

Jerry "Boogie" McCain takes a break from performing on the "Alabama Jubilee" tour in Boaz, Alabama.

monica with his nose. "I play the harmonica with my nose better than a whole lot of people play with their mouth," he said.

Jerry McCain learned to play music by ear, and he composes, as he puts it, "by mouth." He has the gift of being able to write and arrange tunes in his head, which he then dictates into a tape recorder for someone else to transcribe. He is adept at improvisation and has been known to make up tunes while performing on stage. "People see me the next time I play and say, 'sing that

song,' but if I don't write it down, it's gone. I have been in bed and songs go through my mind that'd be good songs. And I'll say, 'I'll do it in the morning.' When I get up in the morning it's gone. It comes and it goes. If you don't write it down while it's coming, then you'll lose it," he explained.

He prefers to write songs that tell a story and many of these stories are borrowed from his own experience. True to the blues tradition, his songs have a personal side to them, but they also provide social commentary and

criticism. Often they reveal his wit and humor. Jerry McCain writes about the world around him, as in his song “Burn the Crack House Down” on his album *Love Desperado*. “Everywhere you go is crack,” he said. “I just put that song together on account of all this crack all over the world. Most of my songs tell a story. I don’t like to write a song, just to be writing a song to make some money. I must tell a story. I have to tell a story.”

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McCain has performed for many years at Birmingham’s City Stages.

Photo courtesy of Debbie Dixon



The Quilters of Gee's Bend

Superstars of American Folk Art

by Joey Brackner



“Legacy” can be defined as “a gift that is handed down from a predecessor.” A “living legacy” would be such a gift that is dynamic and continues to enrich the lives of its beneficiaries. The Alabama State Council on the Arts is proud to present the Living Legacy Award to the Quilters of Gee’s Bend. This group of African-American artists lives in Boykin, a small community also known as Gee’s Bend where women have quilted for at least 175 years. All indications are that quilting will continue here for many more years. The Gee’s Bend quilters occupy an important place in the story of their unique community and have brought great acclaim to themselves, their community and the state of Alabama.

Every once in a while the world discovers Gee’s Bend, where the Alabama River makes a sweeping curve in northern Wilcox County. Antebellum planters with their enslaved workforce discovered that the rich soil would grow cash crops. One hundred years later, New Deal idealists sought to make the community an important economic experiment. In the 1960s, the fashion industry joined with Civil Rights activists to harness the eco-



Photo by Steve Graubinger

Nettie Young, Priscilla Jenkins and Katherine Millhouse at the opening of the “Quilts of Gee’s Bend” exhibit at the Mobile Museum of Art.

nomic potential of the Bend’s quilt making. In the early twenty-first Century, these same quilters have been celebrated in landmark exhibitions in some of the nation’s most prestigious museums. Earlier this year, the United States Postal Service introduced their popular series of stamps based on Gee’s Bend quilts. But throughout these times, the rhythms of life continued among the few hundred occupants of Gee’s

Bend. They worshiped God, created families, sang songs, grew crops and made quilts.

The Gee’s Bend community began as a plantation taking its name from the first landowner, Joseph Gee. In 1845, Mark Pettway acquired the property. He was a large slave owner as were other planters along the Alabama River. After emancipation, the freedmen and



A scene from the Freedom Quilting Bee, ca. 1980.

women of the area took the surnames of their former masters. To this day, Pettway is one of the most common last names in Gee's Bend. It was during this early period that Bend residents first began to quilt.

African-American quilting, like Sacred Harp singing, is synonymous with Alabama. Both art traditions have evolved, survived since the early nineteenth century, and have brought recent positive recognition to the state. Alabama is the touchstone for the current national revival of Sacred Harp, an archaic hymn singing tradition that boasts a zealous following. Its well-organized conventions and singing schools have brought it into the twenty-first century. Quilting, another communal exercise, has also survived, changed and prospered through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Both traditions are, like most southern traditions, a result of cultural contact. The Euro-

American art forms of quilt making and congregational hymn singing were re-formed in the multicultural antebellum South. Whites and blacks sang and quilted, sometimes separately and other times together. After the segregation of races following emancipation, African-American Sacred Harp singing diverged into a different style than its white counterpart. Some believe this divergence may have also occurred in quilt making.

To say that there is an "African-American" style of quilt making is too simplistic because African-American textile artists are so diverse in their backgrounds. Quilt scholars Eli Leon and Maude Wahlman, among others, have suggested a link between African-American quilts and West African, printed cloth patterns. Other scholars, such as Cuesta Benberry, suggest that scholars have arbitrarily chosen quilts with these attributes to make



Medallion quilt by Loretta Pettway.

their case for an African-American quilt aesthetic. However, there are localized folk traditions in African-American quilt making representing that community's idea of what a quilt should look like. Women of these locales, many in the Black Belt of Alabama, such as Gee's Bend, produce quilts with large patterns, accept some asymmetry in pattern and overall shape and use bold colors with strong contrast. Quilts made primarily to exhibit precise quilting stitches do not seem to be part of their style.

By its impressive sample size, the landmark exhibition *The Quilts of Gee's Bend* did a lot to suggest that the aesthetics described above do characterize quilt making in at least one African-American community, Gee's Bend. The exhibition organizers are to be commended for their effort in assembling this large show. The depth of this community's tradition is underscored by the historic

Wilcox County photo ca. 1900 by local photographer Edith Morgan, published on the inside cover of the accompanying catalog/book *The* photo shows a woman airing out four quilts on a fence. The quilts look similar to those exhibited in the show including the ubiquitous house-top pattern.

Through the years, traditional quilt making has maintained its basic procedure. Most practitioners take pieced tops and quilt them with other women. Today, more people quilt alone but the tedious work of quilting the top, batting and back goes by more quickly and pleasantly in a group. Nevertheless, the folk process of face-to-face training in a complicated art tradition has been maintained in both the black and white communities of Alabama. As with all folk art traditions, improvisation occurs within learned practical and aesthetic boundaries. In the case of quilts, the practical boundaries are a three-part quilted cloth construction of a size that will cover a bed. Aesthetically, the pieces satisfy what a quilt should look like among a group of women who share a demographic profile. Part of the folk process is the introduction of new ideas that can be accepted or rejected by the group. Folk artists do not live in a vacuum and are not immune to the national and international movements of art. These influences can affect their work but if the folk process persists, their products will still reflect their community traditions. At Gee's Bend, these tradi-



Photo by Steve Grauberger

Qunnie Pettway and her daughter Loretta Bennett with their Pine Burr quilt.



Photo by Arthur Rothstein, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection [LC-USF346-025363-D DLC]. - replaces the photo of the woman quilting

Sewing a quilt, Gee's Bend, Alabama.



Quilts on the clothesline, Mary Lee Bendolph's yard, Gee's Bend.

tions persisted through some very hard times.

A series of foreclosures on Bend residents during the early part of the Great Depression led to an experimental government program to buy the land and resell it to the families. Services and a cooperative cotton gin were established to help Bend residents control their crops from field to market. The Roosevelt administration also sent the photographers Mary Post Wolcott and Arthur Rothstein to document the community. Folklorist Robert Sonkin came to record African-American folk music there in 1941. The Rothstein photo of Lucy Mooney teaching her granddaughters Lucy and Bertha Pettway beautifully illustrates the folk process of learning.

The political power of Gee's Benders was feared during the Civil

Rights movement. As a result, the ferry service from Camden was discontinued in 1962 to discourage voter registration. Another form of intimidation during this period was threatening one's job security. It was this economic threat that eventually led to the formation of the Freedom Quilting Bee.

The Bend's quilts were first noticed nationally when the Freedom Quilting Bee in nearby Alberta was organized in 1966 with the help of the Reverend Francis Xavier Walter, an Episcopal priest and Civil Rights activist. The idea was to build upon the cooperative ideas of the 1930s to help produce a much needed income stream in the 1960s through the 1980s. The quilts made by Bee employees, including many Bend quilters, were exported throughout the US, aided, in part, by a network of expatriate southern-

ers living in the north. Bloomindales sold their quilts and then in the early 1970s, the Bee went under contract to Sears to produce pillow shams. While the Freedom Quilting Bee helped bring much needed money into the community, it also directed the efforts of textile artists away from their traditional style of work. After a dormant period, the Bee has recently been reorganized. The book *The Freedom Quilting Bee* by Nancy Callahan is an excellent history of this group.

Outside interest in the culture of Gee's Bend continued. In the late 1970s, the Birmingham Public Library and the Alabama Humanities Foundation sponsored photographer John Reese and storyteller Kathryn Tucker Windham to follow in the footsteps of Rothstein and Sonkin. The duo collected photos and oral histories and produced an exhibit on Gee's Bend. A decade later quilters from the Bend were participants in the 1990 Alabama Folklife Festival that was produced by the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the Alabama Folklife Association in conjunction with the second City Stages. *From Fields of Promise*, a public television documentary made in 1993 by John DiJulio, Bruce Kuerten and Mike Trend of Auburn University explored the history of the Bend and included interviews with scholars and Bend residents.

The most recent documentation of the Bend, the exhibitions and books *Quilts of Gee's Bend*

(2002) and *Gee's Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt* (2006) curated by a team headed by William, Paul and Matt Arnett, and organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, has been the most success-

tions. The second exhibition *Gee's Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt* makes of point of including more of the younger generation of quilters and of including essays by some of the artists.

quilt pattern, most associated with the late China Grove Myles, a former member of the Freedom Quilting Bee was selected as the basis for the logo of "2007, The Year of Alabama Arts." The pattern continues to be made by Gee's Bend quilters as part of their living legacy to us.



Photo by Anne Kimzey

Mary Lee Bendolph addressing the crowd at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival on August 31, 2006.

ful in presenting the genius of this community of artists. The exhibition venues have included Houston, Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Mobile Museum of Art, the Jules Collins Smith Museum and many other great American museums. The efforts have also received much print and national broadcast media. In describing the 60-piece exhibition *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, the *New York Times* referred to the quilts as being "some of the most miraculous works of modern art [that] America has produced." This first show featured the work of 42 women of four genera-

These recent exhibits have brought the community together and afforded the quilters an opportunity to not only travel to various exhibit openings but also be guest artists at art festivals and symposia around Alabama and the nation. On Thursday, August 31, 2006, the Quilters of Gee's Bend were honored by the United States Postal Service at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in a special ceremony celebrating the issuance of ten 2006 postage stamps based upon Gee's Bend quilts. A few weeks later, the ferry from Boykin to Camden reopened.

It is fitting that the Pine Burr

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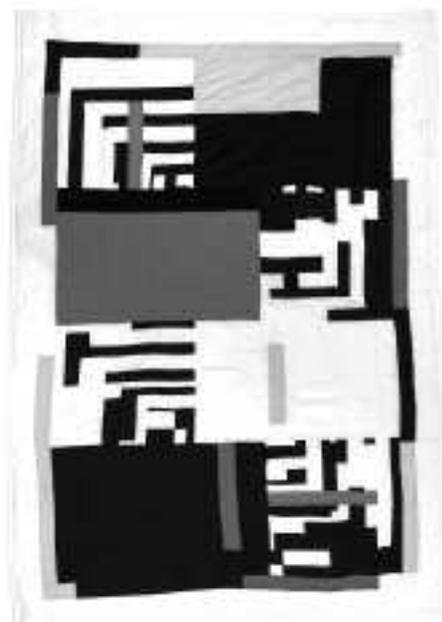
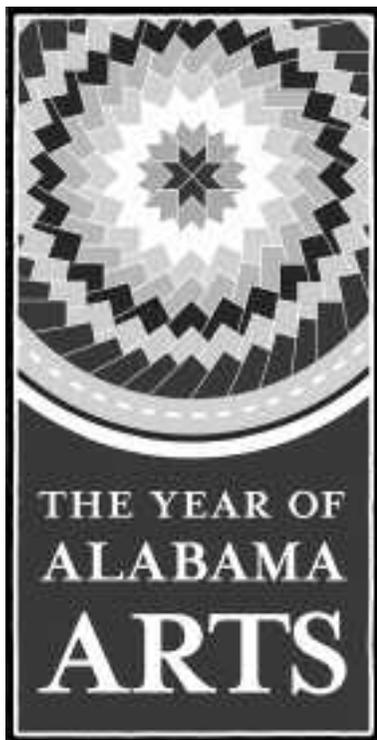


Photo courtesy of Tinwood Books

"Housetop" variation by Louisiana Pettway,



YEAR OF ALABAMA ARTS EXHIBITIONS 2007

ALABAMA ORIGINALS: A SENSE OF PLACE (May 10-June 29) is the featured exhibition in the Alabama Artists Gallery for the 2007 Celebration of the Arts. It showcases photography by artists from throughout Alabama and addresses themes connecting with Alabama land, community, people and custom. This exhibition is in the series of Alabama Artist Gallery presentations organized for the Year of Alabama Arts to celebrate the diversity and strength of the state's artists.

PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS IN THE SERIES:

ALABAMA ORIGINALS: SELF-TAUGHT/CONTEMPORARY FOLK ART. Works by artists producing art outside the fine arts arena with a variety of materials from house paint to found objects.

ALABAMA ORIGINALS: CLASSICAL APPROACHES. Art using traditional techniques in painting, sculpture, printmaking and drawing as means of personal expression.

ALABAMA ORIGINALS: VISUAL ARTS ACHIEVEMENT. Award winning art by Alabama middle and high school students.

UP-COMING EXHIBITIONS IN THE SERIES:

July 13-August 31 ALABAMA ORIGINALS: CONTEMPORARY CRAFT. Fine craft pieces using materials such as clay, fabric, fiber, metal, wood and glass to reflect both utility and sculptural form.

September 9-November 2 ALABAMA ORIGINALS: EXPANDING PERSPECTIVES. Art expressions using a variety of materials and techniques to address broad contemporary ideas.

November 16-January 11, 2008 CARRY ON: TWENTY YEARS OF THE ALABAMA FOLK ARTS APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM. Expressions of the preservation of folk skills by master folk artists teaching their art form to apprentices.

The Alabama Artists Gallery, located at the offices of the Alabama State Council on the Arts in the RSA Tower in downtown Montgomery, 201 Monroe, provides an on-going showcase of the work of Alabama artists in all media. Hours are M-F from 8 am-5 pm. For additional information contact Georgine Clarke, phone: 334-242-4076, ext 250; email: georgine.clarke@arts.alabama.gov

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The rich quilting legacy of four generations of African-American women in rural Alabama was celebrated when the U.S. Postal Service issued the Quilts of Gee's Bend commemorative postage stamps at the American Philatelic Society's (APS) annual convention and philatelic exhibition. These stamps are sixth in the American Treasures Series, and feature the ingenuity and improvisational style of the Gee's Bend quilters.

The 10 Quilts of Gee's Bend self-adhesive stamps feature photographs chosen by art director Derry Noyes. The quilts were created between 1940 and 2001.



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