

ALABAMA ARTISTS GALLERY

The Alabama State Council on the Arts is proud to showcase the work of Alabama artists in its Montgomery gallery in the RSA Tower, downtown.

Hours are Monday - Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

QUILTS & VESSELS SEPTEMBER 7, 2012 - FEBRUARY 8, 2013

Since its doors opened to the public in 1951, the Birmingham Museum of Art has collected and exhibited the art of Alabama. Among the earliest works to enter the collection were paintings by significant Alabama artists including the miniaturist Hannah Elliott and the landscapist Carrie Hill. Throughout its history, the Museum has continued its commitment to the arts of Alabama. In 1995, it organized *Made in Alabama*, a groundbreaking survey of artistic production in the state during the nineteenth century.

In addition to collecting the works of academically trained native artists, the Museum has built an impressive collection of folk art, including painting, sculpture, quilts, and pottery. Thanks to the generosity of Robert and Helen Cargo, the Museum possesses one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of Southern quilts in the country. Similarly, several major private collectors are helping the Museum build the most significant repository of Alabama pottery in the State.

Featured in the exhibition are:

Chris Clark
Nora Lee McKeown Ezell

Mary Ann Rouse Thomas
Yvonne Wells

Yvonne Wells began making quilts in 1979. Her earliest creations were patchwork: her own designs based on traditional patterns, but were distinctly "imperfect" (in her words). Finding traditional patchwork somewhat confining, she sought a new creative direction, and began making story quilts in 1983. The subject matter of her stories ranged from religious scenes to social and political commentary, themes for children, and her pointed and often humorous observations of life in general.

Chris Clark loved making art as a child, but began painting in earnest when he thought he was going to lose his eyesight. Thankfully, he was treated by a doctor and his vision improved and he kept painting. He learned to quilt from his grandmother and began painting his quilts with scenes of children playing and religious images. He created a variety of objects including walking stickers, chairs and sculpture, which, along with the painted quilts, are appreciated by collectors and museums all over the country. He also taught art to children and was able to encourage them to tell their story in their art often saying, "I tell these kids that I don't care how they draw something, as long as they express what they're trying to say and get their emotions out. With my quilts, that's what I've always tried to do."

Nora Lee McKeown Ezell is best known for her story quilts – elaborate and profoundly original illustrations of events and history – Ezell also excelled at pieced quilts, where she joined fabric edge-to-edge. Simple geometry combines with vibrant color to create dynamic movement. Perhaps inspired by the traditional "Wild Goose Chase" pattern, Ezell's many hued birds careen across the sky with abandon. In 1992, the National Endowment for the Arts named Ezell a Master Traditional Artist and awarded her a National Heritage Fellowship.

Mary Ann Rouse Thomas, her husband and their 13 children and other family members, offer a view into the simple and basic life of a pioneer family in remote Alabama at the end of the 19th century. Eleven of Thomas' quilts have survived including this remarkable "Tree of Life" or "Pine Tree" quilt. The needlework is not particularly fine, but it is the strong design quality of the black stripping at the outer edges of the four corners that sets it apart and distinguishes Thomas' eye and spirit. In addition, Thomas used the printed cottons at her disposal most effectively, framing each tree trunk with a stripe, creating the illusion of a horizon.



*The Georgine Clarke Alabama Artists Gallery
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