

ChathamArts Gallery is alive with stories

By Deborah R. Meyer

In the spring of 2008, Lilly Skok Bunch, an arts consultant to the Chatham County Arts Council, took a drive with the council's new director, Molly Matlock. They were going to meet with Cabarrus County Arts Council Executive Director Noelle Rhodes Scott to learn how, in eight years, she had transformed her tiny agency into a thriving council that has a beautiful exhibit space and performing arts center. The trip was a great success according to Matlock but not simply because of Scott's inspiring tales. While there, Matlock and Bunch had seen the council's current exhibit of photography, textiles, wood work, and sculpture that told the story of the area's local identity and were wowed by it. "The pieces revealed the influence that cultural and community context bore on shaping the artists' work. While each artist had a unique vision, each also clearly drew inspiration from thinking about their surroundings and the experiences of the people around them and about those who came before them," Matlock said.

Through March, the ChathamArts Gallery, 115 Hillsboro Street in Pittsboro, is hosting a show inspired by that Cabarrus exhibit. "Tradition & Transformation, Our local History Through Artistic Expression," features clay artist Libba Adams and wood artist Roger Dinger. Their works are complemented with pieces by weaver and textile artist Joan Belden, watercolorist

and documentarian Florence Johnson, and found object artist Vietta Maher.

Libba Adams had been getting her hands into clay since the 1980s, but her work took a more serious turn around 2003 when she began taking clay classes at CCCC in Siler City with teacher Dan Rhode and later Richard Danek. A clinical social worker, Adams makes lamps in her spare time, which she sells through River Road Pottery (195 Nick's Bend West, Pittsboro, 968.6806). Rhode introduced Adams to the method of firing her work in a wood kiln, which creates what is called atmospheric firing. The clay and the glazes go through a chemical transformation inside the kiln due to internal atmospheric changes. This process differs from firings in an electrical kiln where there is no atmospheric change, only high heat. The wood kiln Adams uses is located in Carbondon in an old gristmill. "It is this ancient kind of wonderful place," Adams said. Wood firing is hard work and involves hauling six-foot planks of wood to feed the kiln, keeping the heat at a steady temp of about 2300°F. and making sure the smoke gets good and black over a 12- to 18-hour period. "It is really dirty and tiring but one of the most gratifying things. I almost burned my eyebrows off stoking. You are organically connected to the elements. I feel like it is the same thing potters have been



Roger Dinger, here with pieces of a coat tree, has created art with salvaged wood since 1992 when he salvaged an old barn in Guilford County.

doing for centuries," Adams said. "I find that pottery is a very centering and therapeutic thing. I don't think I had realized how important it was until I got into it. I think it enhances your life."

Creating has certainly enhanced Roger Dinger's life as well as given him a more firm connection to things organic. The wood he uses to create his pieces is salvaged from old structures. Dinger long had been attracted to the beauty of weathered wood when in 1992 he was given a chance to salvage a barn in Guildford County that was on an old farm tract about to be developed. "I fell in love with the wide oak boards the minute I saw them. I didn't know what I was going to do with the wood but I got permission from the developer to take it. Later those boards became an entertainment center, paneling in my den and pictures

frames. I just really like the wood. I like to see what can be done with it," said Dinger, who lives on the Rocky River between Siler City and Pittsboro (www.reinbarnation.com, 542-4937).

Dinger was a professional land surveyor and keeps his license current in case he needs to get back to it. For now, his business is thriving. One of his pieces is a corner table made from pine boards salvaged from a salt-cure house in Silk Hope. Another is a small table made from

pine boards reclaimed from a hermit's abandoned cabin, built circa 1920, in Wake County, on land that was to be developed.

"When I get the wood I really don't know what it will end up being. After I pull out the nails I put it in dry storage," Dinger said.

He keeps a list of pieces he has conjured up in his mind and when he gets set to release them from his imagination, he goes into his stacks seeking pieces that will work. "Sometimes the ideas will change as I look at the wood. I sort of listen to it and hear what it is capable of being," said Dinger, who also does commissioned pieces.

Don't miss the stories these pieces of art have to tell. Somehow, they involve us.

Deborah R. Meyer, a Chatham writer, can be contacted at 942.3252.

Engaging Worship, 10:20 a.m.
God's Kids Gone Wild and Souljourn Café, 9:35 a.m.
1089 East Street (between Holt's Furniture and Pittsboro Animal Hospital) in Pittsboro



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Saturday, March 14 at 10 a.m.
 A Workshop offered by Sergeant Marc Houston of the Pittsboro Police Department.

The Open Jam for Musicians
Friday, April 3 at 7:30 p.m.
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Earth Day Festival
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 Pet food drive, an adoption event, music and an animal blessing at Noon.

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