



from these hills

Contemporary Art in the
Southern Appalachian Highlands

October 5, 2023 - February 4, 2024



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From These Hills: Contemporary Art in the Southern Appalachian Highlands is one of William King Museum of Art's longest standing traditions. First held in 1993, this biennial is unique in its geographical scope and the number of artists it has presented who live and work in Southern Appalachia. This year marks William King Museum of Art's sixteenth biennial with twenty-eight artists from around the region chosen by juror and guest curator Ali Printz, PhD Candidate: Specialization in Modern and Contemporary Appalachian Art.

Printz's curatorial vision for this year's *From These Hills* has been shared through this essay highlighting the conceptual approach of each of the exhibiting artists.

selected artists

Adam Trabold	Johnson City, TN
Alynda Worrell	Milligan University, TN
Autumn Roe	Bristol, TN
Becky Campbell	Bluff City, TN
Blane Sage	Atkins, VA
Cavan Fleming	Blacksburg, VA
Charlie Brouwer	Willis, VA
Dan Van Tassell	Glade Spring, VA
Ella Floyd	Roanoke, VA
Erin Simons	Wytheville, VA
Gregory Smith	Banner Elk, NC
Hannah Watters	Charleston, WV
Jake Ingram	Knoxville, TN
Jeff Chapman-Crane	Eolia, KY
Jennifer Hand	Dublin, VA
Joyce Garner	Prospect, KY
Kim Abernethy	Boone, NC
Larry Rollins	Lebanon, TN
Leslie Campbell	Flag Pond, TN
Linda Atkinson	Fincastle, VA
Meghan Groves	Kingsport, TN
Pippi Miller	Pearisburg, VA
Rebecca Mabry	Marion, VA
Roger Atkins	Boone, NC
Savannah Leeman	Radford, VA
Shauna Caldwell	Banner Elk, NC
Tom Hansell	Creston, NC
Travis Graves	Johnson City, TN



Adam Trabold, *Refraction*,
black and white analog photography silver gelatin print



Autumn Roe, *Construction*, interactive installation



Gregory Smith, *The Secrets of the Trees*, acrylic on canvas



Shauna Caldwell, *A Song I Must Have Known*, photography



Larry Rollins, *Orange Blossom*, wood

As a curator, scholar, and practicing artist born and raised in West Virginia, the Appalachian region is deeply ingrained within my psyche and radiates through everything that I do. It is an honor to be chosen as curator for the sixteenth edition of *From These Hills*, a biennial tradition that has influenced Appalachian art for over thirty years. It is groundbreaking to see practicing contemporary artists express the distinct regional characteristics I have studied and written about throughout my life. Appalachian artists tend to focus on their environment, whether subconsciously or consciously, as the flora and fauna of the rugged mountains have provided shelter, medicine, food, kinship, and spiritual comfort for hundreds of years, taught in part by indigenous peoples to our immigrant ancestors. Yet since the Industrial Revolution, our region has been timbered, mined, stripped, overlooked, and scapegoated but our unique cultural heritage and appreciation for the mountains is ever present in the artwork chosen for this biennial exhibition. Whether the artists are native to the region, or were drawn to Appalachia and now call it home, the work represented spans and combines multiple disciplines; craftwork, sculpture, painting, drawing, photography, installation, and video work.

Several specific themes have emerged in the 2023 edition of *From These Hills*, all of which work interchangeably with each other in defining Appalachian regionalism. These themes include appreciation for the Appalachian landscape and how its representation is linked to spirituality, the use of craft as both a storytelling agent and a functional object, and the confrontation of stereotyping in Appalachia and how regional identity, kinship, and placemaking supersede these negative markers.

One of the uniting aspects of Appalachian art is its complicated history with extraction, a factor that is ever-present in the devastation that unchecked resource removal causes generationally. When one thinks of extraction in Appalachia, the first word that comes to mind is coal. Appalachia's mountains are the oldest in the world and contain some of the richest resources, creating the perfect storm for labor and environmental exploitation at the hands of corporate greed. The work of **Hannah Watters** reflects these complicated histories, as well as coal as a means of survival in many Appalachian communities. *Shelf Life 3* is visceral and reflective of geological layers of earth, split open for the purpose of extraction. Black pigment peeks through the layers, sinister and lucrative at the same time. **Pippi Miller's** photography similarly addresses extraction of the land and its longstanding effects in *Seeping Regrets* and *Substrata Guardian*, which show Appalachian land ripped and upended, exposing subterranean layers of minerals. **Cavan Fleming**

tackles the generational and longstanding connections to coal with his drawing *Slag Pile*, a scene of an adult and child walking towards a heap of refuse and playground equipment; a duality of safety and harm.

Travis Graves addresses the extraction of Appalachia's temperate rainforests with his sculptural piece *Skinned* by replacing the bark of a tree with the skeletal structure of human bone. While the tree still bares leaves, its foundational bark is stripped, revealing that trees are entities and hold a place on this earth as much as humankind. Similarly, **Gregory Smith** uses trees conceptually in his painting, *The Secrets of the Trees* to highlight the nostalgia of trees through abstractions in the landscape, and through the internal ring structure, to question their use and removal.

Religion and spirituality in Appalachian art is forever tied to the landscape of the mountains, as well as influences of folklore, indigenous teachings, and Christianity, thus creating a complicated tapestry of interpretation. Many of the works in the biennial reflect spirituality and a kinship with nature, and the empowerment that results from the combination of the two. **Kim Abernethy** uses her paintings to highlight not only the beauty of the Appalachian Mountains, but also the majesty of its color palette and subtle atmospheric changes, meditative in their execution. **Joyce Garner's** painting, *2022*, is a spiritual mixture of family, landscape, recurrent history, and Appalachian culture. **Becky Campbell's** *Appalachia Samsara* combines aspects of tradition, Christianity and eastern-based religions that focus on karma and reincarnation, simultaneously connecting Appalachia to the global south and reflecting on nonlinear, cyclical time.

Ella Floyd's photographic work focuses on the connections between folklore and spirituality in and the female form within the landscape, celebrating individuality and kinship in the hollers. Both *Escape from Babylon* and *Through the Looking Glass* offer glimpses of an Appalachian communion with nature; one that cleanses the soul and strengthens a connection to the land. *Miss Unknown County* is a raw portrayal of beauty in Appalachia, a contemporary queen of the mountains, reminiscent of Andy Warhol's *Dolly Parton* from 1985. **Shauna Caudwell's** photography also reflects a sense of communion with the mountains and its people, and an esteem for nature and moments that elevate the soul. In both *A Song I Must Have Known* and *Untitled*, a hand lovingly grasps a robin, healing it for its eventual return to the forest; likewise, two hands touch each other over a worn blanket, radiating comfort and security.

Appalachian forests offer a sense of spiritual kinship with the



Charlie Brouwer, *Into*, charcoal on paper



Travis Graves, *Skinned*, carved magnolia branch



Erin Simons, *Antler Whisk*, natural materials



Linda Atkinson, *Night Flight*, carved and painted mahogany



Blane Sage, *Famine*, oil on canvas

cycle of life and death, a concept that **Rebecca Mabry's** *Holy Ground* beautifully addresses through the contrast of living ferns with remnants of an animal aging on the forest floor. **Charlie Brouwer's** work is akin with nature on an otherworldly level, highlighting union with the forest, and the alienation and vastness of being alone within it. *Night Flight* by **Linda Atkinson** is a mahogany vessel in communion with spirit and nature, as the soul unites with the flight of the moth to rise high above the heavens. **Leslie Campbell's** work also holds a spiritual kinship with nature. Her sculpture, *Connecting with the Divine*, shows the importance of mushrooms to spirituality and personal identity, while her painting *Celestial Nest* is both critical of throwaway culture and reflective of its impact on the forest.

The history of craft in Appalachia is longstanding and has been used not only as an artistic outlet, but a usable tool generationally. **Erin Simons**, who works in the vein of traditional broom making, not only preserves Appalachian tradition, but uses her creations as a vehicle for storytelling. *Wedding Broom* and *Antler Whisk* combine functional objects with natural materials to allude to the union of two souls in matrimony, as well as the honoring and repurposing of found mountain objects. The work of **Jennifer Hand** also uses found mountain objects in combination with craft work. *Marcescence Series V* consists of a leaf meticulously sewn on vellum, surrounded by intricate graphite drawings of the forest and knitted material, combining both craft and fine art seamlessly. In *Before There Were Words There Was Shadow and Light*, the hand-quilted fabric scraps have been sewn together to create the body of a tree, representative of the laborious nature of craft, combined with a synesthetic understanding of the forest. **Jake Ingram** also uses a combination of fine art and sewing in his work; *I Thought We'd be Farmers*, combines printmaking with quilting to challenge Appalachian identity in addressing generational expectations. **Savannah Leeman** questions the definition of craft by merging painting and quilted elements in *The Template*, and how tradition is discriminated generationally. **Megan Groves'** quilt not only expresses the longstanding tradition of craft as a medium, but incorporates the telltale mountain landscape, in *Horizontal One*, into both a usable object and a cultural marker of the region.

The work of **Roger Atkins** highlights another long standing tradition within Appalachian craft, the art of woodworking at its most minimal form in *Reactivate*. The beauty of the wood grain is laid bare, meticulously crafted, sinuous, and sharp like the remnants of a tree in the forest. **Larry Rollins** also addresses woodworking traditions in his "illusions," but combines intricate basketry, and patterns of indigenous artists, to create unique colorful constructions reminiscent of the past.

Stereotypes about Appalachia have been present culturally since at least the 19th century and still permeate opinions of the region today. Many of the artists in *From These Hills* use their artwork to counteract stereotypes of poverty, diversity, clannishness, and affiliation, such as **Jeff Chapman-Crane**'s intimate portraits of Appalachian people and rural life. *Crossings* addresses not only diversity in the region, but the reality that Appalachian towns are seen as homogenous by outsiders that lack the understanding of its history of exploitation. His paintings *All is Vanity* and *Days Gone By* show a sense of longing and nostalgia, as well as Appalachian resiliency. **Adam Trabold**'s photography similarly creates a feeling of nostalgic resiliency, finding beauty in the seemingly mundane, illustrating a convenience store as a beacon of light in a food desert. **Blane Sage**'s portraits in contrast, *Famine* and *Pestilence*, are nuanced and look directly at the viewer. This is reminiscent of Grant Wood's *American Gothic*, surrounded by stark apocalyptic skies and subtle references to the book of Revelations. Analogously, *Motherhood*, a painting by **Alynda Worrell**, blurs the lines between psychology and expectations in the bible belt of Appalachia. An intimate portrait with childlike doodles highlights religion, flora and fauna, and the juggling of daily life as a mother.

Artists like **Autumn Roe**, **Tom Hansell**, and **Dan Van Tassell** help to dispel stereotypes through interactive installations. The installation works of Autumn Roe, *Construction* and *Nature's Relic* encourage kinship and an understanding of Appalachian tradition by encouraging the viewer to investigate the usage of botanicals from the forest, long utilized in medicine, folklore, and as sustenance. The interactive work of Tom Hansell stresses the long-term carelessness of plastic waste in the waterways of Appalachia and its effects on the region thus encouraging participation in changing our environmental reality. Dan Van Tassell's interactive installation, *I Wish*, analyzes how humans interpret information and symbols, a unification of human nature and constructed narrative.

The artists and works selected for the sixteenth edition of *From These Hills* are a testament to the foresight and understanding of the history of the region and the urge to both preserve our culture and elicit positive change.

– Ali Printz

PhD Candidate: Specialization in Modern and Contemporary Appalachian Art



Jake Ingram, *I Thought We'd Be Farmers*, woodcut hand quilted hand embroidered



Becky Campbell, *Appalachian Samsara*, acrylic on canvas



Kim Abernethy, *High Mountain Meadow*, oil on canvas

About the Curator

Ali Printz

Ali Printz is an Appalachian historical painter, curator, and art historian who studies the exclusion of Appalachia in modern and contemporary American art and is currently pursuing a PhD from the Tyler School of Art & Architecture at Temple University in Philadelphia. She received a BFA in Painting and BA in Art History from West Virginia University and an MA in Contemporary Art at Sotheby's Institute of Art, New York. Her research has been supported by Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, The Henry Luce Foundation, The Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Center for Curatorial Leadership, and The Decorative Arts Trust. Her recent publications include *Panorama Journal* for the Association of Historians of American Art and inclusion in *Queering Appalachia's Visual History: A Collection of Queer Appalachian Photographers*, published by the University of Kentucky Press in Fall 2024.

Producing as a painter for close to 20 years, Printz's work addresses Appalachia's cultural merits and multilayered histories and mixes elements of craft, found objects, and technology in combination with historic photographic sources. Her work has been shown both nationally and internationally and various venues throughout the Appalachian region. Her recent exhibitions include *Du-Good*, a retrospective of printmaker Leslie Diuguid at Subliminal Projects in Los Angeles, inclusion in the group exhibition *Women's Work: Redefining Appalachian Traditions* at the University of Kentucky, and her solo exhibition *Into the Mountains* at William King Museum of Art in spring 2023.



Jeff Chapman-Crane, *Crossings*, egg tempera



Savannah Leeman, *The Template*, mixed media



Dan VanTassell, *I Wish*, mixed media



Front cover images (rows, left to right)

Jennifer Hand, *Marcescence Series V*, vellum, graphite, beeswax, leaf, thread; Joyce Garner, 2022, oil on canvas; Alynda Worrell, *Motherhood (Amber)*, oil; Leslie Campbell, *Connecting with the Divine*, clay and wood; Ella Floyd, *Miss Unknown County*, archival pigment print; Meghan Groves, *Horizontal One*, textiles; Hannah Watters, *Shelf Line*, mixed media

Back cover images (clockwise from top)

Rebecca Mabry, *Holy Ground*, photography; Cavan Fleming, *Slag Pile*, graphite and mixed media on board; Roger Atkins, *Reactivate*, wood; Tom Hansell, *Plastic Confluence Series*, found plastic; Pippi Miller, *Substrata Guardian*, photography

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