

from these hills

Contemporary Art in the
Southern Appalachian Highlands



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November 13th, 2025 to March 15th, 2026

William King Museum of Art (WKMA) is pleased to present the 17th biennial exhibition *From These Hills: Contemporary Art in the Southern Appalachian Highlands*. One of WKMA's longest standing traditions, this major exhibition showcases fresh, dynamic works across a variety of mediums, celebrating the vision and creativity of artists from our region.

This year's exhibition is juried and guest-curated by Kathy Foley, Director Emerita of the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin. Foley'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

Kristeen Beasey	Bristol, VA
Gregory Berg	Asheville, NC
Kevin Scott Burrill	Abingdon, VA
Marcy Criner	Christiansburg, VA
Katie Davidson	Johnson City, TN
Tom Fehr	Bristol, TN
Mark Flake	Trade, TN
Chrys Corn Goodman	Alexander, NC
Jacob Goodman	Alexander, NC
Richard Graves	Abingdon, VA
Travis Graves	Johnson City, TN
Carmen Grier	Bakersville, NC
Dawn Griffith	Lansing, NC
Ken Johnson	Wytheville, VA
Jan Knipe	Radford, VA
Lisa May	Chilhowie, VA
Pippi Miller	Pearisburg, VA
Robin Miller	Bluefield, WV
Casey Murano	Roanoke, VA
Virginia Otey	Wytheville, VA
Kristy Moeller Ottinger	Greeneville, TN
Eric Purves	Sugar Grove, NC
Rehanna Rojani	Roanoke, VA
Blane Sage	Atkins, VA
Dori Settles	Spruce Pine, NC
Jessie Shinn	Asheville, NC
Amanda Sprinkle	Abingdon, VA
Adam Trabold	Johnson City, TN
Kandee Wallace	Castlewood, VA
Mat Wheeler	Johnson City, TN
Anna Whitted	Abingdon, VA



Carmen Grier, *Set Sail*, oil



Jessie Shinn, *The Neighbor's House with Fireflies*, colored pencil



Gregory Berg, *Viola doesn't have too many books: until it's time to move*, digital photograph



Marcy Criner, *Frozen in Time*, photograph



Kandee Wallace, *La Monarca*, acrylic and goldleaf

Serving as the juror for the 2025 edition of *From These Hills* was an honor and an exhilarating experience. Though I call the Upper Midwest home, through an ongoing project focused on the William King Museum of Art, I have come to learn about and deeply appreciate the extended Southwest Virginia region, its landscape, talented artists, and art enthusiasts.

Prior to considering the 175 artworks submitted by fifty artists for the exhibition, I wondered what I would find. Would there be overarching themes? What would catch my eye and hold my attention? Would there be a diversity of mediums and artistic styles?

I approached the review with an entirely open mind and was rewarded with an array of impressive, competent, thought-provoking, and simply delightful artworks.

My appreciation goes out to all fifty artists. It takes courage to submit artwork for scrutiny by a juror. Don't be discouraged if your work was not selected; instead, think about your practice within the context of the thirty-one artworks chosen. Perhaps there will be points to glean that will lead to future success.

To those artists whose work I selected, I offer hearty congratulations!

My initial review of submitted artworks was focused on visual impact. On the second pass – done in reverse order – I began to envision how *From These Hills* might come together. A third pass solidified my thinking. I next considered the statements written by each artist. As my thoughts and notes percolated and jelled, I was able to refine my selections and also see themes and categories that give the exhibition a coherent structure.

Let's start with references to the region's communities, distinct landscapes, and everyday moments. Kristeen Beasey's *Lamplight on Main* captures the twilight stillness along historic Abingdon's Main Street. Jessie Shinn presents a distinctly different – and hauntingly beautiful – light in *The Neighbor's House with Fireflies*. *Woodland Opening*, a plein-air painting by Tom Fehr celebrates a verdant Johnson City, Tennessee, forest. Also working en plein air, Jan Knipe's moody and luscious *Trees on the New River* is done in charcoal. Though abstract, the swirling colorful eddies in Casey Murano's *Let the River Keep Flowing 5*, were created alongside the Greenbrier River in Summers County, West Virginia, and incorporate river water. Also evoking the water is Carmen Grier's *Set Sail*. Directed upward, Ken Johnson's handsome *Simple But True*, shows us bird life on high, offset by billowy clouds.

Five artists focus on human and animal likenesses. Lisa May gives us *Otis*, *One Fine Ram*, incorporating recycled paper and musical notes, while Kevin Scott Burrill's *What're You Lookin' At?* offers a resplendent snowy owl posing along a stunning shoreline. The human figure is skillfully handled by three artists: Kandee Wallace adds gold leaf to *La Monarca*, as butterflies flutter on the surface and also partly obscure the figure; Blane Sage's *Mr. Crouse* is part of a series of portraits created by the artist entitled *Faces of Appalachia*; and Anna Whitted's *The Flora That Raised Me* is a self-portrait incorporating the symbolic flora – daisies, Queen Anne's lace, violets, periwinkle chicory, morels, and Jack-in-the-pulpit – that define the artist's life in Appalachia.

A polyptych, *Faces of Strangers*, by Richard Graves, comprises thirty-six watercolor portraits, each, I suspect, with a story to tell. Storytelling is richly represented in *From These Hills* and covered via multiple mediums. Dori Settles' *Toddler Work Boots* is made of glass utilizing kiln-casting techniques rooted in pâte de verre. Reminiscent of enameled or bronzed baby shoes, Settles' boots encourages us to think about the stories contained within as well as serve as a prompt to consider our own stories. Some stories might be revealed through careful scrutiny of an artist's imagery or references drawn from titles. Mark Flake's *The Fox and the Crow* is filled with rich iconography, while Robin Miller's *Tag Team* is based on collages of old Archie comic book pages. In *Appalachian*

Metaphysics, Eric Purves gives the viewer a lot to consider, as we ponder how culture influences creativity. Chrys Corn Goodman invites us into a “shared space of reflection, feeling, and presence.” Her *Sangre de Madre (after Zúñiga)* is both figurative and abstract, its bands of bright colors obscuring and emphasizing elements of the female form.

Dawn Griffith’s *Masquerade*, a ceramic sculpture, is modeled on the artist’s own face and reflects the emotional dissonance of bipolar disorder. Diagnosed in her fifties, clay became the language through which the artist navigated the complexities of the disease. The mask is “both shield and burden, capturing the tension between public composure and the private turbulence beneath it.”

Photography takes many forms in *From These Hills*. In Marcy Criner’s *Frozen in Time*, from her *Horses Speak* series, a square format highlights the power and stature of a horse incongruently holding an oversized pocket watch in its mouth; do horses think about time? Gregory Berg’s *Viola* might also be thinking about time in *Viola doesn’t have too many books: until it’s time to move*. Another incongruous pairing, the digital photograph features books and a soft-sculpture figure – Viola – inside a cardboard box.

Three additional photographs interpret patterns in intriguing and distinct ways: Adam Trabold offers *Encroaching Vines*, captured in Washington County, Tennessee; Rehanna Rojiani’s *Greenway* collage pairs a photograph taken along the Roanoke River Greenway with another photo from the inside of the artist’s home looking outward, thereby juxtaposing distinctly different places; and Pippi Miller’s *Duplicitous Meditation*, in which a jumble of trees suggests a way to find peace amongst chaos.

Mediums that speak to the Appalachian region include Amanda Sprinkle’s basket, *Triple Cherokee Wheels*. Handwoven, the round functional basket features three rows of denim blue Cherokee Wheels overlay. Also functional, Virginia Otey’s hand-built stoneware jug, *A Visitor Among the Vines – Tomato Jug 1*, was inspired by the artist’s garden tomatoes. Kristy Moeller-Ottinger’s art quilt, *Now and Then*, celebrates spirituality through textures and colors. The addition of yo-yos, zippers, and flying geese quilt blocks adds to the quirky style, while watches along the right border symbolize the passage of time.

Pushing a medium to dramatic effect is Katie Davidson’s diminutive India ink *Torso*. The artist says her juxtapositions are “conceptual frameworks that challenge boundaries and invite dialogue.” Mat Wheeler’s sculptural ceramic vessel, *Growing Jar*, pushes, too, through the convergence of the familiar and the ambiguous. The artist cites experiencing pareidolia – seeing the seemingly abstract as something recognizable – while creating in his studio.

Rounding out *From These Hills* are two works in wood. Jacob Goodman’s elegant *Vessel* is described by the artist as a “dialogue between hand, material, and form . . . guiding viewers to experience wood in its most essential state.” Travis Graves takes wood in another direction, carving a magnolia branch to create *Laid Bare*, exploring a familiar subject in an unfamiliar way.

Please use these thoughts – mine and those of the artists – to consider the array of artworks that comprise the 2025 edition of *From These Hills* and to make your own observations about the work on view.

Kathy Kelsey Foley
Director Emerita, Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum
Wausau, Wisconsin



Mark Flake, *The Fox And The Crow*, oil



Casey Murano, *Let the River Keep Flowing 5*, watercolor, river water, charcoal, crayon



Dori Settles, *Toddler Work Boots*, glass



Kristy Moeller Ottinger
Now and Then, fiber



Virginia Otey, *A Visitor Among the Vines — Tomato Jug 1*, stoneware



Katie Davidson, *Torso*, India ink



Robin Miller, *Tag Team*, acrylic



Amanda Sprinkle,
Triple Cherokee Wheels, hand-dyed rattan reed, oak handle, weaver’s stain



Eric Purves, *Appalachian Metaphysics*, acrylic

About the Curator

Kathy Kelsey Foley has made Wausau her home since 1997, having previously lived in the community for five years beginning in 1986. Kathy has the distinction of serving as director of the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum twice, her tenures separated by her family's time away from the community. She returned to the helm of the Woodson in March 1998, retiring in December 2022. In recognition of Kathy's service, the Museum's Board of Director's awarded her the title of Director Emerita and renamed the Rooftop Sculpture Garden in her honor.

Kathy received her undergraduate degree in art history with departmental and general honors from Vassar College and a Masters degree also in art history from The Johns Hopkins University. Her museum training and professional and corporate experience include stints in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC; curator at The Dayton Art Institute; founding director of Northwestern University's Block Museum of Art; and the Gap, where she served as manager of corporate internal communication.

During Kathy's Woodson tenure, the Museum was one of only ten 2017 recipients of the National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the nation's highest honor, awarded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a Federal agency. Kathy was inducted as a Fellow of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters in April 2014, and received the Association of Midwest Museums' Distinguished Career Award in November 2020.

Since 2009, Kathy has served Aspirus Health in a variety of capacities. She is currently Chair of the Aspirus, Inc. Board of Directors and Chair of the system Quality Committee. In May 2024, Kathy delivered the keynote address at the Medical College of Wisconsin-Central Wisconsin Campus Commencement and received an Honorary Doctor of Humanities degree.



Blane Sage, *Mr. Crouse*, oil



Pippi Miller, *Duplicitous Meditation*, archival pigment print



Kristeen Beasy, *Lamplight on Main*, oil



Chrys Corn Goodman, *Sangre de Madre (after Zuniga)*, oil, cold wax, acrylic, and charcoal



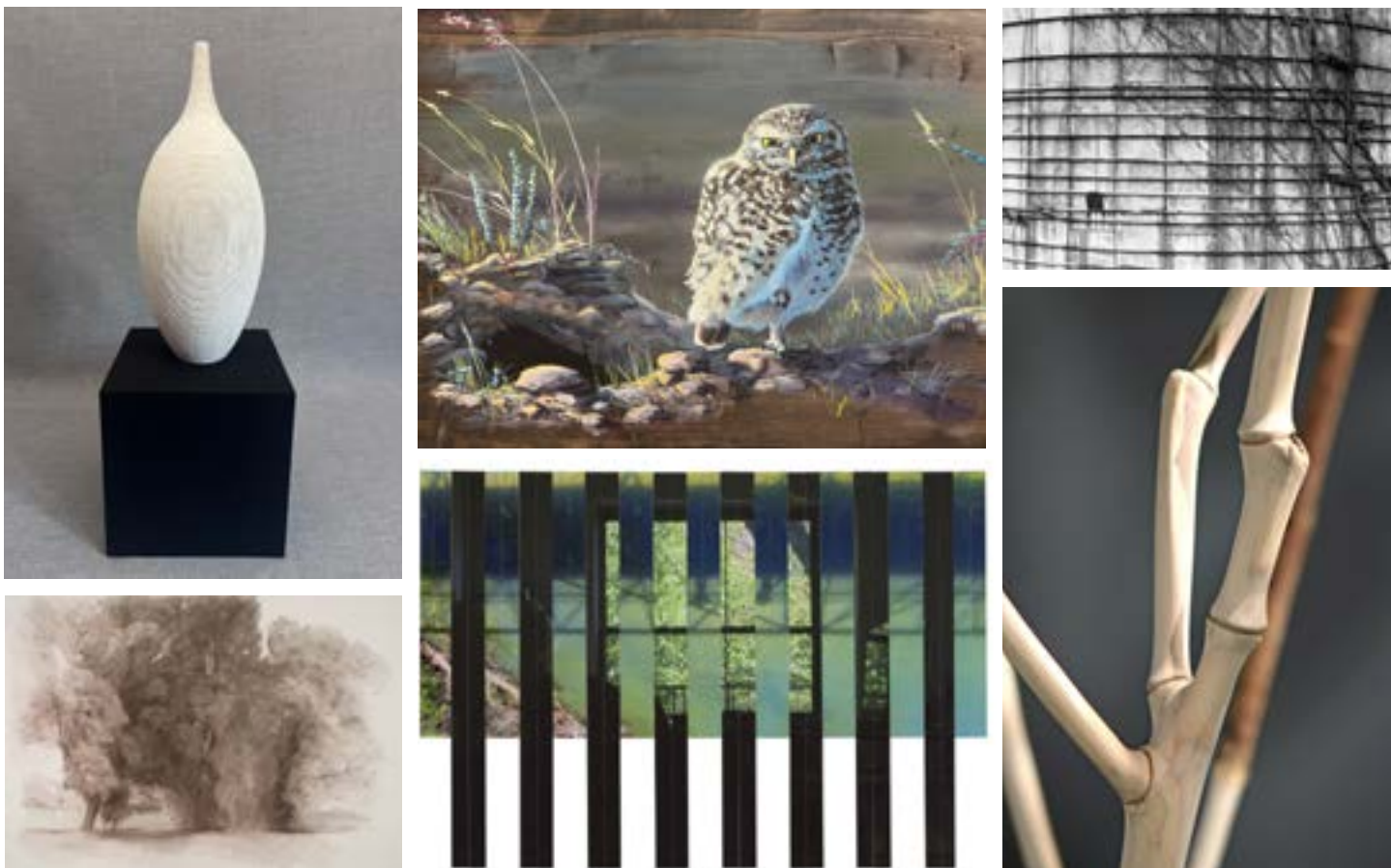
Dawn Griffith, *Masquerade*, clay, underglaze, cold wax



Anna Whitted, *The Flora That Raised Me*, oil and acrylic



Mat Wheeler, *Growing Jar*, thrown and hand-built stoneware



Front cover images (rows, left to right)

Lisa May, *Otis, One Fine Ram*, hand painted and recycled paper; Richard Graves, *Faces of Strangers* (polyptych), watercolor; Ken Johnson, *Simple But True*, oil; Tom Fehr, *Woodland Opening*, oil

Back cover images (clockwise from top)

Jacob Goodman, *Vessel*, wood; Kevin Scott Burrill, *What're You Lookin' At*, acrylic; Adam Trabold, *Encroaching Vines*, silver gelatin print; Travis Graves, *Laid Bare*, carved magnolia branch; Rehanna Rojiani, *Greenway*, photography; Jan Knipe, *Trees on the New River*, charcoal

This exhibition is a William King Museum of Art original exhibition and is part of the museum's McGlothlin Exhibition Series. "From These Hills" is generously sponsored by Elizabeth A. McClanahan.

WILLIAM KING MUSEUM OF ART

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