

VISUAL ARTS



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'MOCKINGBIRD' WORDS INSPIRES EXHIBIT'S ARTISTS

ART INSPIRED BY 'TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD': AWAKENING AMERICA'S CONSCIENCE

Sponsored by Alabama Humanities Foundation. The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. Through May 14.

Fifty years ago, the publication of "To Kill a Mockingbird," by Harper Lee, took America by storm. It continues to be one of the most popular books of our time, a story that is the subject of academic study, a work dissected and analyzed to the point of exhaustion. Above all, it is a story that has touched the hearts of every generation since its publication. It was turned into one of the most popular motion pictures ever made, gaining icon status in that genre.

In recognition of this publishing sensation, and as part of a series of events across Alabama, the Alabama Humanities Foundation is sponsoring an invitational exhibition of works that have a relationship to, or which are inspired by, the novel. Thirty-seven well-known Alabama artists accepted the invitation to participate in this event. The works on view are to be sold at silent auction, with the proceeds benefiting the AHF.

It is impossible in the space available to comment on all the works included in this show. The variety is considerable, ranging from very sophisticated works to naive folk art. All have a relationship to the story that is obvious and direct, while others



Carolyn Goldsmith's "Bird Mocking, Girl Rocking," on display at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, evokes the feel of Harper Lee's novel, "To Kill a Mockingbird."

are sometimes a bit obtuse. The intent and content of the works presented all bear a strong relationship to the truths that are the lyrical essence of the Harper Lee story.

The works deal with, or reveal, the quiet impact of the story. Many are efforts to serve as illustrations for the text, or at least have implications to the meaning of the story. Using various mediums and styles, the artists present a wide range of aspects of the novel that sensitively ex-

plore one or more aspects of the tale. The inspiration — and limitation — of this kind of image-making is that, in some subordinate way, it is subject to the story's narrative.

Many pieces reflect on time and place, using the character of buildings, the local floral plants and other characteristic elements of how life was lived in a small Southern community. The use of mockingbirds and cardinals, of cotton balls and magno-

lias, of swings made of old tires, references to the Alabama Code of Justice and a myriad of other subjective relationships are identified with the days of the Depression in the South. Some are generic references to attitudes and practices that suit the point of this exhibition, but could well survive outside any such context.

An indicator to the quality of this show is evident by the names of the participating artists, Nicolosi, Mary E. Kimbrough, Lonnie Holley, Bruce Larsen, Catherine Cabanisa, Nali, Chip Cooper, Sally Legg, Wesley Higgins, Bethanne Hill, William Christenberry, Charles Lucas, Clayton Colvin, Annie Butrus, Randy Gachet, Janice Kluge, Doug Baulos, Karen Grafio, Jane Timberlake Cooper, Beverly Erdreich, Susan Perry, Amy Pleasant, Barb Bondy, Jennifer Harwell, Carolyn Goldsmith, Marilyn Wilson, Barbara Evans, Darius Hill, Jane Marshall, Brian Edmonds, Larry Thompson, Derek Cracco, Charles Caleb O'Connor, Frank Fleming and Jerry Brown bring their talents to this project.

This is a unique exhibition that everyone should see. It will bring back memories for those who found the book a vivid and vital experience, and it will inspire those who have not read "To Kill a Mockingbird" to get a copy of this truly phenomenal literary work.

James R. Nelson is visual arts critic for The Birmingham News.