

# Five Women of Appalachia

## their stories and their art

### kari gunter-seymour PHOTOGRAPHY

While engaging in conversation concerning art, amid a diverse group of local women one evening, the idea for a locally focused art exhibit came to me. So, with an attitude of great expectation, I began a query, to seek out other female artists who, like myself, were expanding their comfort zones, exploring new mediums, investigating shape, form and color. How had living in this Appalachian community fed *their* desire to create current work? What would *their* stories be?

I envisioned, paint, clay, glass and photography. My quest set its own momentum. I literally stumbled into each participant in a very serendipitous way. As a group we moved forward to present "5 Women of Appalachia, Their Stories and Their Art."

We are women of diverse backgrounds, ages and talent, pleased with the opportunity to share our creative spirits, our stories and even our music with each other, as well as with you, our viewers.

The inspiration for my work comes from many places. Ideas are only half of the equation ...

Being a part of this Appalachian community is, for me, enablement. Everyday life here naturally lends itself to creative interpretation. We are a community that has a passionate belief in the strength of family, our friendships are as precious and honor is a living, thriving attribute we strive to uphold. I feel safe here. I feel strong.

I earn my living as a graphic artist and volunteer time to many non-profit organizations. I spent many years in a leadership position at the Foothills School. In 2000, I was the school's lead liaison in partnership negotiations between Foothills and Hocking College that culminated in the development of Hocking's successful American Art, Design & Marketing degree program.

Though art has always been a part of my adult life, this cluster of work is a totally new direction for me. It seems like a gift – to see a moment in time – then capture it earnestly, yet in harmony with my self imposed aesthetic. This selection of photographs, presented in a variety of mediums, is intended to visually simulate what occurs after we observe an image, store it and then recall it throughout time with conscious and unconscious thought processes. For me, recollection is sometimes crystal clear and at other moments appears as quick glimpses, shadows and faded tones.

### bonnie proudfoot GLASS

I began working with glass in 1977, and two years later, moved to West Virginia to a homestead in the woods. Little did I know that two of the longest-established stained glass factories in America were within a short drive (Wissmach Glass and Blenko), and a third factory would soon be built (Youghioghenny Glass). For a glass artist, this was (almost) heaven!

For years I worked in stained glass, taking commissions, showing work, and teaching. In 1996, I moved to Athens, to attend Ohio U. By 2000, I was teaching at Hocking College, where I had a part in formulating their Glass Degree Program.

Recently, I have been experimenting with kiln-working glass, learning techniques to change the texture, density, color, and design of sheet glass. This creates a wide new palette for expression. My latest work began with a walk in the southeastern Ohio woods in early spring, when the underbrush was still dormant, and the swollen creek had just begun to settle into its banks. Half buried in silt were fragments

of bones from animals that had died during winter. It is dramatic and startling to find these remains. Chances are, the creek will rise again. Chances are, these fragile bones will crumble.

As I glass artist, I am always aware of the permanence of my medium. These new pieces are a contemplation of preservation and decay.

### jennifer mcclung PHOTOGRAPHY

When I was a sophomore in high school, I read *Spoon River Anthology* by Edgar Lee Master and was immediately impressed with the idea that each dead person lying under a tombstone was not an abstraction but had once been a living, breathing person, and as such had a unique story to tell. Thus began a conscious examination and contemplation of life and death, cemeteries, epitaphs, and gravestone decorations. It stood to reason, therefore, that when I took a camera into my hands the most compelling imagery I would shoot would be cemeteries and gravestone markers. I've been photographing cemeteries since 1985 and still find them to be the most humbling, compelling, and life-affirming places created by man.

I lived in Appalachia during my early youth and found that it allowed a level of introspection that would not have been possible in an urban environment. I was left to wander tree-covered hills and valleys, to poke a stick down a crawdad hole, and to listen to the silence after snow falls. This experience enabled me to become extremely aware of and sensitive to nature, especially the cycles of nature: the birth of spring, summer's growth, the decline of fall, and winter's seeming death- the totality of human existence compressed into a one-year cycle. Since returning to Appalachia in 2002, I have a deeper understanding of the significant role environment plays in one's creative and personal development- and I'm grateful for Appalachia's contribution.

### mary beth hickman CERAMICS

Growing up as an Appalachian all my life, I have been raised with a strong sense of family ties, good friends and traditions. In an Appalachian atmosphere people take pride in one another, their responsibilities, and making sure no one goes without. We pass down know how and skills from one generation to another. It's not just an area in which people live, but a way of life.

I have found a new direction and passion for the arts that was unexpected. With breaking free from traditions, I have been exploring and developing my own skills and craft, finding myself on the way.

With this body of work, I've been experimenting with the alternative firing method of barrel-firing. This process is interesting for the sheer fact that nothing comes out exactly the same way. It's different with each and every firing. The concept of creating a positive and negative space that engages in the smothering, smoldering and smoking after the firing has completed, fascinates me. This process has helped me achieve the desired effects of color and the variety of marks onto the clay bodies that are unpredictable. This is the way I wish to be interpreted, unpredictable!

### mary chamberlain PAINTING

Art has always been a part of my life. I earned a BFA in painting from James Madison University in Virginia. After moving around a bit, I settled in Athens with my husband and two sons in 1993. We had a sheep farm and fibers business which evolved into Feltworks Studio, a wholesale fine crafts business, where I created contemporary felted artwork for fine craft galleries around the country. Since closing that business in 2007, I have returned to the fulfilling pursuit of painting.

My current work is an interpretation of everyday scenes here in Appalachian Ohio. The subjects of my paintings—ordinary houses, run-down buildings, two old chairs—aren't important. What matters to me is the opportunity to simplify an image into basic forms defined by rich color combinations. A building on my walk to work from the parking lot reveals itself as a large block of red and pink. The drive-thru where I pick up a gallon of milk at dusk becomes a buzzing yellow streak against a purple background. To share that interpretation is what I want to do.

**POETRY READING March 12 6 PM – 8 PM Four local writers will share their work in the theater lounge beside the gallery.**