

Arts Center of Kershaw County

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Quilts in Birmingham, England. Lenz is represented by the Grovewood Gallery in Asheville, NC.

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The Orangeburg County Fine Arts Center in Orangeburg, SC, Offers Works by a Family of Artists

The Orangeburg County Fine Arts Center in Orangeburg, SC, will present *A Family Affair: Staley, Staley and Gibson*, featuring works by Alvin Staley, Bretta Staley, and their daughter Dr. Kizzi Staley Gibson, on view in the Lusty Gallery, from Oct. 6 through Nov. 24, 2021. A reception will be held on Oct. 6, from 6-8pm.

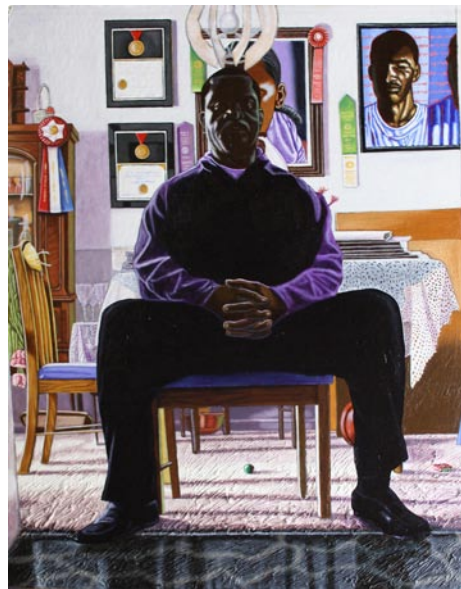
The exhibition consists of 36 works, 28 two-dimensional artworks using oil on panel, oil on canvas, acrylic on canvas, colored pencils and mixed media, and eight assemblages by Bretta Staley.

Images of religious art, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Islam are, in the first instance, usually associated with the origins and early growth of these world religions. Christian artists in the early centuries of the common era, (C.E.) produced themes and imagery to inspire and uplift spiritual awareness. The most repeated themes were scenes of Jesus and the life of Jesus. With the emergence of the Renaissance Era, art devoted to Christianity would become less of a prominent subject as artists devoted their talents to the more lucrative secular works.

The most successful Christian art today can be defined as modern and abstract, with contemporary themes left to personal interpretation. Claiming a space in that genre are three artists from the same family, who express their deep religious affiliation with imposing works inspired not only and attributed to scripture, but which are also conceptualized through devotional experiences.

“Team Staley” as award-winning artist Alvin Staley, husband to Bretta and father to Kizzi, refers to his family, exclusively includes Biblical reference in his work, “I would have to say that I invest emotionally in my work by remembering the One for whom I am creating this artwork.”

Staley references Colossians 3:17, a verse included in the writings of Paul to the early Christians as the apostle encourages various assemblies to strive to emulate Christ through compassion, humility, patience, and forgiveness.



Work by Alvin Staley

In Staley's work titled *Roman 12:1-3 #2*, the male figure dominant and centered sitting in a simple chair, hands clasped, still in his humility, has for a background an equally simple lace-covered table, a chair behind which is a wall heavy with award-winning art and accompanying award-winning certificates and ribbons. Also hanging on the background wall of this piece are head and shoulder paintings of a subject in a plain white t-shirt tinting in purple as are the chairs' cushions and the generous sleeves of the centered subject. Symbolism is everywhere to be examined in light of the title which, again, is scripture. Here Paul is urging the newly converted Christians to



Work by Bretta Staley

ensure that their everyday, ordinary lives are placed before God as an offering. Paul further instructs to live in grace.

When asked has his self-described genre, in its form and content, after years as an artist liberated his imagination, Staley says that is not how he sees his work. For him, it's more about closely aligning himself with his Christian beliefs. “I hope that I have been bringing my imagination into the captivity of Christ Jesus, so that what I express, and what I create will flow as if it is from the mind of Christ.”

Alvin and Bretta Staley have devoted the last 40 years to their art and as art educators. While husband and wife are in tandem in their religious beliefs, Alvin's observations of Bretta work are that she has entered a phase of remarkable creativity.

Bretta Staley calls one of her assemblages *The Cosmic Christ*. This work is a vivid and compelling representation of Christ as he is being crucified, wounded, head bowed, body bleeding. His cross is presented as a batik fixture, with soft otherworldly reds, pinks and blues contrasting with dark details offsetting the figure and the blended coloring. The traditional loin cloth, usually depicted in crucifixion, is replaced by a fabric, tied, bunched and gracefully hanging from his side. A vertical pattern of his blood decorates the top half of the cloth, which is edged with rows of round metallic pieces the color of silver.

Bretta Staley reminds that the meaning of cosmic must be present when approaching this assemblage, both to appreciate the work and where her imagination led her to venture in expression. The cross is cosmic.

“Jesus Christ was born of flesh; lived in the world; created the world, and by His power, He sustains the world. Jesus Christ is the Cosmic Christ. For He is the God, creator, and sustainer of the cosmos.”

Bretta Staley's Biblical reference is John 1:1-14, the last verse which says, “And the Word was made flesh and dwell among us.” The New Testament is central to her work “to share the Gospel and provide an oasis of visual refreshment to all that partake of the exhibition.”

However, as Alvin Staley noted, Bretta Staley's current quest also includes self-discovery. After years of committing much of her creative energy to her vocation as an art educator, this new plane is about her individuality as an artist. “I make art to satisfy my desire of self-expression. Subsequently, this creative quest allows me to use unique innovative abilities in an expressive, distinctive, and inventive manner.”

While Alvin Staley was collecting awards and ribbons, under their tutelage, so were their students. Bretta Staley ac-

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knowledges that enabling and inspiring art through education is a factor in her creative process. “Our art students knew us as ‘Team Staley.’ Our high school students garnished top artistic awards at district, state, national and international levels. We were teachers who not only taught art but practiced our craft as well.” Now her craft is her focus.

Dr. Kizzi Staley Gibson, the Staley's daughter, not surprisingly, followed in her parents footsteps as an art educator, having obtained a doctorate while dividing her time between teaching and honing her own talents. Communication is foremost in Gibson's work. She references its importance often when describing her pieces.

“The main purpose of my artwork is communication. Every work of art I create communicates a message.” And through communication? “My drive to create is rooted in my desire to visually communicate my thoughts, ideas, and raw emotions in a way that is completely unstifed and authentic.”

The *Creation of the Cosmos*, mixed media and one of a series of seven, suggests the converging of matter forming into a sphere, creation in colors symbolizing brilliance and energy. Evolving away from a milieu of multicolored amorphous elements, the round planet, emerging, is behind dripping strands of a black substance, sometimes three-dimensional in its thickness. These symbolic strands in front of, if not being absorbed onto the planet's vibrant surface, unsettles at the same time as the pervading patterns of colors convey the permanence and complexity of this evolving sphere.

Asked collectively if they critique one another's work and if so, how. Alvin Staley replied, “We use objective criticism to view each other's work. That is to say we examine the structural elements based upon sound design principles. We also critique works based upon whether the manipulation



Work by Dr. Kizzi Staley Gibson

of the elements and principles are communicating the desired message.” And that's as far as it goes, according to Staley. “We try to stay clear of subjective viewpoints, and simply examine the works on the basis of artistic and aesthetic merit.”

The three family members are united in their Christian beliefs and see their works as offerings to the host of humanity whatever their religion and also to non-believers. Embracing that concept as they work through the tenets of their Christianity is fundamental as expressed by Alvin Staley.

“All my life I have felt that being an artist was a calling and a gift from God. I've always believed that man cannot create, for there is but one creator, God Almighty. The very best that we as artists can do is merely try to re-create the beauty of what God has already created.”

For further information check our SC Institutional Gallery listings or call the Center at 803/536-4074.

The deadline each month to submit articles, photos and ads is the 24th of the month prior to the next issue. This will be October 24th for the November 2021 issue and Nov. 24 for the Dec. 2021 issue. After that, it's too late unless your exhibit runs into the next month.

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