

# Greenville County Museum of Art in Greenville, SC, Offers Works by Mary Whyte

Watercolors tell the poignant stories of people whose jobs are fading away in the exhibition *Mary Whyte: Working South*, which opens to the public on Mar. 9 and continues through Sept. 18, 2011, at the Greenville County Museum of Art in Greenville, SC.

*Working South* brings together fifty watercolors, the product of a 3½-year project by Charleston, SC, artist Mary Whyte, which resulted in the newly released book from USC Press, *Working South: Paintings and Sketches by Mary Whyte*. The theme began to develop in 2007 when she was working on a commissioned portrait of a Greenville banker. While he was posing for sketches, Whyte commented on a newspaper headline about the closing of a textile mill. "In ten years," said her subject, "all of those jobs may be gone."

That conversation inspired a journey through ten Southern states, as Whyte researched and interviewed subjects, developing the studies that would culminate in paintings of hard-working Americans in professions that often fall under the radar. These are intimate portraits of workers left behind when jobs are outsourced or shipped offshore, people who are more related to the "old economy" than the new. They are cotton pickers and textile mill workers, wooden boat builders, crabbers and shrimpers, and tobacco farmers, among many others.



Spinner, textile mill worker, Gaffney, SC

Whyte met Annie Lindsay at the Springfield Mill in Gaffney, SC. The artist asked the woman to pose for photographs of her at work for the painting that would become *Spinner*. In Bishopville, SC, Whyte was working on sketches at a diner when she met an itinerant crew of industrial cleaners. They are presented in the monumentally scaled *Fifteen Minute Break*. "They looked like chimney sweeps," said the artist. "The only clean place on them was where they wore their goggles."



Beekeeper's Daughter, beekeeper, Simpsonville, SC

Whyte found her subjects one by one with suggestions from family, friends, and Page 18 - Carolina Arts, March 2011

people she met along the way. She wasn't always welcomed, as she explained in a book she published to accompany the exhibition, "A few company executives bristled at my request to paint a 'vanishing industry.' I was shown the door more than once."

"I had a pretty good idea of where I was going with my list, and what kind of person I would meet," added Whyte. "I kept working my way south until I found what I was looking for, or until it found me. Any pre-conceptions I had would almost always prove to be wrong. I was continually astonished by the people I met, not only by their differences but by the things they had in common."

Upstate South Carolina plays a central role in the exhibition. Not only did Whyte find several of her subjects here, but she also spent portions of two summers painting in a cottage in rural Simpsonville, SC. Owned by Doug and Billie Hogg, the cottage became Whyte's home and studio as she escaped the summer bustle of Charleston. She worked nearly twelve hours a day, taking a break at noon to share a farm-style meal with the Hoggs, who tended bees and grew vegetables that Whyte found almost unimaginable. One of their daughters, Jane Bechdoldt, is featured in the painting *Beekeeper's Daughter*.

"There are hundreds of people I could have painted," wrote the artist. "Some of my choices were simply subjective. Most often, I looked for a profound quality, a humanness, that is easily recognized and can translate into the simplest of paintings."

Born in Ohio in 1953, Whyte graduated from the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, PA, with a degree in fine arts and a teaching certificate. She has earned national recognition in both watercolor and oil painting,

but she is recognized principally for her figurative watercolors. Whyte's portraits can be found in corporate, university, and private collections, and in museums that include the Greenville County Museum of Art.

Whyte is also an avid teacher who conducts painting workshops at locations around the country, including an annual session at the Greenville Museum. She has written instructional books and articles, including *Watercolor for the Serious Beginner*, 1995, and *An Artist's Way of Seeing*, 2005.

Here's an excerpt from the foreword from Whyte's book *Working South*, written by Martha Severens, former curator, Greenville County Museum of Art.

"*Working South* is not only the title of a recent body of work by Mary Whyte, but also a metaphor for her personal transition from the North to the South. Through her art and sincere personality, she has worked her way into the hearts and minds of southerners, whether natives or recent arrivals. Like the many sitters in her paintings, Whyte is emblematic of a New South, except for the fact that her subjects represent industries that are shrinking, if not disappearing, while her reputation and horizons are ever expanding."

"This series is not her first focusing on southerners; for ten years she painted members of a church community not far from her adopt-

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ed home on Seabrook Island near Charleston, South Carolina. Culminating in a book and a traveling exhibition, *Alfreda's World* celebrates the warmth and generosity of spirit that embraced Whyte shortly after her arrival in the area. Moving from Philadelphia, where she had attended the Tyler School of Art, she was primed for a nurturing environment after a recent bout with cancer. As she explains: "We knew that we had to move to a place that would give us deeper meaning to our lives - a place where we could reinvent ourselves and start over." Her encounter with Alfreda and her fellow quilt makers at the Hebron Zion St. Francis Senior Center on Johns Island was a happy accident that bore fruit in many ways."

There are several programs related to the exhibition in the museum's Sundays@2 series. All take place on Sundays at 2pm and all are free and open to the public. On Mar. 13, Whyte will give an illustrated lecture on the exhibition. A book signing with the artist will follow. A docent-led tour of *Working South* takes place on Apr. 17 and June 19; and members of the Emrys literary foundation will offer poetic interpretations of the art on May 1. A *Working South Family Adventure* takes place on July 17, 2011.

The exhibition is sponsored by Carolina First. Carolina First Bank is a trade name of TD Bank, N.A.

An exhibition of works from *Working South* will travel throughout the South through 2013. After leaving Greenville the exhibit will be on view, Dec. 1, 2011 - Mar. 11, 2012, at the Morris Museum

of Art in Augusta, GA; May 4 - Sept. 9, 2012, at the Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston, SC; Oct. 5, 2012 - Feb. 24, 2013, at the Telfair Museum of Art in Savannah, GA; and Apr. 6 - July 7, 2013, at the Peninsula Fine Arts Center in Newport News, VA.



Study for Beekeeper, Simpsonville, SC

*Working South: Paintings and Sketches by Mary Whyte* - 10" x 11 1/2", 128 pages, 55 color illustrations, 6 black & white illustrations, hardcover. For further info about the book visit (<http://www.sc.edu/uscpres/books/2011/3967.html>).

For further information about the Greenville County Museum of Art or the exhibit check our SC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Museum at 864/271-7570 or visit ([www.greenvillemuseum.org](http://www.greenvillemuseum.org)).

## First Citizens Bank in Hendersonville, NC, Offers Mentors & Students Exhibit

First Citizens Bank in Hendersonville, NC, in conjunction with The Arts Council of Henderson County in Hendersonville, NC, is presenting the exhibit, *Mentors and Students*, which consists of three exhibitions: *The Art of Our Children: Elementary School Exhibit* (on view through Mar. 11), *Art Teachers Create* (Mar. 18 through Apr. 1), and *Artists of Tomorrow: Secondary Student Exhibition* (Apr. 8 - 22, 2011).

*Mentors and Students* is sponsored in part by Morris Broadband, First Citizens Bank, WTZQ AM 1600, and the Times-News. Additional supporting sponsors include: Van Winkle Law Firm, Education Foundation of Henderson County, and

Economy Drugs.

The Arts Council of Henderson County is a community organization that promotes, advocates for and nurtures the arts in Henderson County and western North Carolina. The Arts Council is supported in part by the North Carolina Arts Council, several funds administered by the Community Foundation of Henderson County, and the Henderson County Travel and Tourism Bureau.

For further information check our NC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Council at 828/693-8504 or visit ([www.acofhc.org](http://www.acofhc.org)).

## Woolworth Walk in Asheville, NC, Features Works by Debbie Skelly and Avian Thibault

Woolworth Walk in Asheville, NC, will present the exhibit, *Creation*, featuring gourd works by Debbie Skelly and works in ceramics by Avian Thibault, on view in the FW Front Gallery, from Mar. 1 - 30, 2011. A reception will be held on Mar. 4, from 4-6pm.

Debbie Skelly's love for gourds started when she moved to Maggie Valley, NC, in 2005. She saw her first gourd in a gallery in Boone, NC, and from that day on she knew that she wanted to work with gourds. Skelly's designs are influenced by nature, Native American and Southwestern styles. She often incorporates dream catchers, bears, turtles, butterflies, hummingbirds, dragonflies, and kokopellis into her gourds.

Skelly uses a variety of mediums such as leather dyes, inks, polishes, paint and clay. Carving and wood burnings are also used on many of her gourds, and natural embellishments and beads often added as accents.

Avian Thibault creates ceramic wall tiles embellished with sacred images. She has always been curious about the true inception of all religions, and is deeply fascinated by the ones she finds to be enlightened around the world. She started making "sacred tablets for peaceful places" in the year 2000. She loves creating these sacred images, describing it as a "blissful meditation", and thrives off of bringing them to life for others to enjoy.

For further information check our NC Commercial Gallery listings, call the gallery



Work by Avian Thibault

at 828/254-9234 or visit ([www.woolworth-walk.com](http://www.woolworth-walk.com)).