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- Help Wanted
- Lap By Lap **NASCAR**
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- Advertising Rates**
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- Dear Abby
- Movie Listings
- TV Listings
- Online Games
- Other Newspapers

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- Daily News-Record
- The Warren Sentinel
- Shen. Valley-Herald
- Page News & Courier
- The Valley Banner



[Virginia's Travel Information Service](#)

Friday, September 3, 2004

[Back To Home Page](#)

# 'Soul States' Highlights Artwork of Area Artists

By Maggie Wolff Peterson  
*Special to The Winchester Star*

Ren Crawford's paintings are large and explosive, her canvases an expression of color in dynamic contrast.

Geraldine Wonjo Kiefer's collages are dense and contemplative, her shadowboxes a suggestion of the spiritualism in nature.

Both artists' work are being featured during September at Dancing Fire Gallery in Winchester, in a show, "Soul States," which kicks off today with Winchester's downtown First Friday events.



Both Crawford and Keifer are members of the nine-artist cooperative that owns and manages the gallery on Boscawen



Artist Ren Crawford prepares her work for an exhibit, "Soul States," opening today at the Dancing Fire Gallery in Winchester. Artist Geraldine Wonjo Kiefer is also featured in the show. (Photo by Ginger Perry)

Street. Exhibition in the gallery is offered as part of their membership, according to founding member Leslie Betz, a potter.

"It gives them a

chance to show new work and a deadline," she said. "It's something special to show yourself off."

Originally planned for earlier in the year, the joint exhibition was moved to September, giving the artists more time to create new pieces. "Each of us has been really painting and drawing and working over the summer," Kiefer said.

Among items featured will be manipulated photos that Kiefer has created, based on shots of Shenandoah Valley battlefields. "It's a series I'm working on," she said.

Using colored pencils and paint, Kiefer alters photos to create original art. Some photos, captured digitally, are first manipulated on the computer.

"I find that a photo becomes more than a photo," Kiefer said. "They become dimensional."

The result is "a new landscape, something that wouldn't really exist if it weren't created," Kiefer said. In the exhibit, Crawford's canvases will be mounted on easels behind Kiefer's shadowboxes, to create a juxtaposition of the styles that the artists find complementary. "Her work is also a nature meditation," Kiefer said.

At her home studio in Strasburg, Crawford's work is everywhere: stacked against walls, hanging in every room. Paint-saturated brushes find their way into the kitchen sink. She offers patrons the chance

- I used to but don't have time anymore
- I never send them
- I try to send them out every year

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to take a piece home and live with it for awhile before purchase, trusting that the painting will attach itself to the patron. Crawford's entire demeanor is one of exuberance about her work.

Crawford's original first name was Rachel. She created the name Ren as an acronym constructed of her first name, plus the first two of the three surnames she has



This is a sample of the artwork by Geraldine Kiefer on display at the "Soul States" show at the Dancing Fire Gallery in Winchester.  
(Photo Provided by Bruce Kiefer)

collected in her 70 years. First married at 18, she was a Navy pilot's widow before her 20th birthday. So she married a Marine flyer, and stayed his wife for decades.

It was while stationed in Hawaii, at home with two small children, that Crawford determined that the washing machine was the largest uncluttered space on which she could spread canvas to paint. Later, when she discovered that the oilcloth on the kitchen table was backed with canvas, she stripped the cloth from the table to paint on it.

"I wasn't a very good military wife," she said. "My children went to school with spots of paint on them. I just refused not to paint."

Since her early days, Crawford has been a private art instructor and was once an art teacher for the North Carolina public schools. She has exhibited throughout the mid-Atlantic, and in the 1980s directed the Danner House gallery in Middletown, which exhibited the works of 27 artists.

Crawford still gets up each morning with painting on her mind. "I paint first," she said. "I use my best energy for painting."



Of her own work, Kiefer writes, "the collagist is a gardener," whose play with materials creates "a garden of paradise." Her pieces incorporate such natural materials as leaves, pods, shells, moss and rocks, as well as ribbon, photographs and tile.

"She puts it all together in a grand performance," Kiefer says of herself. "But she lets each player speak her piece."

Kiefer, an assistant professor of art history at Shenandoah University, received her bachelor's degree in studio art and art history at Kent State University in Ohio, and went on to earn master's and doctoral degrees in art history and contemporary art. She has exhibited not only in Winchester, but also in Ohio, Georgia, and Hawaii.

Like Crawford, Kiefer has been a resident of Hawaii. Her exposure to the volcanic mountain landscape, exotic flowers and ocean winds of the islands, leads her to call the Hawaiian panorama "the primary and primal fount of life."

She refers to her work as "shrines." A new series, which she entitled the Cherry Blossom Intermezzo, is based on photographs of the trees surrounding the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C., that were a gift to this country from Japan.

The photographs are printed on heavy, watercolor paper, which gives them a different quality than photos on regular, slick stock.

"These are not by any means tourist pictures," Kiefer said. In Japan, the cherry tree is respected and iconic, and figures significantly in the culture and in art.

"They refer to the Emperor," she said. "They're aristocratic."

Dancing Fire Gallery is at 15 E. Boscawen St. and is open from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Fridays, and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays. Soul States runs through Sept. 30.

[Back to Home Page](#)

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