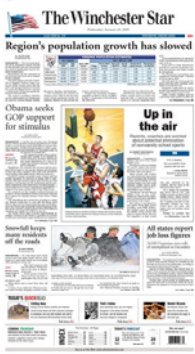


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This artist incorporates words into the collages

By Val Van Meter
The Winchester Star

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WINCHESTER — "This is meditative work."

Geraldine Kiefer is explaining her mixed medium collages, which will open a month-long exhibit at the Loudoun Street Gallery during the upcoming First Friday evening on the downtown mall.

"This is a wonderful example of mixed media," said gallery owner Lauri Bridgeforth. "I love the way she incorporates words into it."

The gallery will be open from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, to show Kiefer's work to the public and allow them to meet the artist.

Downtown Winchester sponsors the First Friday events most months with gallery openings and downtown events held during evening hours.

Kiefer, an assistant professor of art and art history at Shenandoah University, has taken photographs which her husband shot at Nimrod Hall, an artist's enclave in Bath County, and turned them into three-dimensional art pieces, inspired by the feelings and memories they invoke.



Geraldine Kiefer holds Mnemonic Sextet, one of four images in a series created by herself and husband Bruce Kiefer. They are some of the works they are displaying at Loudoun St. Gallery. (Rick Foster)

"I literally draw on the photograph," Kiefer said.

She draws on it for inspiration and then she draws on it with colored pencil, adding lines and tones.

"Then, I begin to use words. I write on it, in a calligraphic way."

The words are much like free verse, Kiefer said, but not poems, simply phrases.

"It's my response to nature, or the image. It's an exploration of my own feelings. It doesn't bother me if the words blend into the lines and form a pattern or shape."

"Her work really shows that a photograph doesn't have to be 'just' a photograph," said Bridgeforth, who is a professional photographer herself.

Kiefer then frames her works, often creating a "shadow box" feeling by layering paper behind, and sometimes even in front, of the image.

She may even add dried flowers, or little branches, "something extracted from their world" to the images.

The limit of that world, Nimrod Hall, has allowed Kiefer to group the work into several series.

The facility offers lodges, cabins and cottages, as well as a former boys camp area. Photos taken of the same structure or area, over several years, allow her to feature a variety of moods, from the same spot.

"The Smith Family Cemetery, 2006" is one such series.



The rusted fence, the gravestones eroded by time were "particularly poignant," Kiefer said.

"It's very meditative," and that meditation can extend from the life of those particular people, "to our own lives," she added.

A more recent series, "The Song and Rythm Series," featured buildings in the former boys camp, Kiefer said.

The old piano in the dining hall sparked the title.

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This is a detail of one of the Keifers' works in a four-part series. Note the fine handwriting that Geraldine Kiefer applies all over the images taken by her husband Bruce.
(Rick Foster)

"The camp image is much 'noisier' than the quiet of the cemetery," she added.

Kiefer, who has been teaching at Shenandoah University since 2003, also leads art excursions to museums in Northern Virginia.

Although originally planned for SU students, the trips have been opened to the community when space is available.

"With contemporary or modern art, you have to get to see it," Kiefer explained, and that can't be done by looking in a book.

The trips, she said, "are fun. I enjoy letting them lose to look at the objects themselves. I can't say no to anything regarding art."

Kiefer's works at the Loudoun Street Gallery are meant to be viewed "up close," she said.

"They are primarily black and white or muted color," because, she said, she wanted the viewer to be drawn, not to exciting color changes, but to the calmness that emerges from the pictures themselves.

"They become a meditation and perhaps, an escape from the inattention of our world."

"Her work is going to be a wonderful addition to our gallery," said Bridgeforth.

The Loudoun Street Gallery will be open from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday for the artist's reception. For information, call 540-665-9484.

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