

Three Applegate artists take their art in new directions

BY DIANA COOGLE

When Applegate artist Barbara Kostal retired from commercial and commissioned work, she didn't pack up her easel and put up her feet. Instead, inspired by Dhyani Ywahoo's book *Voices of Our Ancestors*, she took her art in a new direction, delving deep inside her spiritual self to see what emerged in a new series of paintings called *Wisdom of the Heart*. But it doesn't take retirement for an artist to turn in a new direction. Rick Faist, from Williams, was once a painter, until a home-school project with his son caused him to put his brushes aside for the craftsman's art of making kalimbas. Likewise, Greeley Wells, who lives on Carberry Creek, put away his paintbrushes when he discovered the joy of making movies. Now dust glints in the sunlight in his studio, as Greeley roams the outdoor world with his camera.

Barbara Kostal

Barbara Kostal's studio, a wedding gift from her husband, David Calahan, has French doors that open onto a balcony overlooking undulating fields, canopying oaks, and layers of Applegate mountains. Barbara often paints there, letting snow



Artist Barbara Kostal at work out on her studio balcony at her residence, which she calls a "woody paradise."

fall on the painting called "Winter" and the sun's heat saturate "Summer."

"I have freedom in this woody paradise," she says, "to express myself, to be aware of my surroundings, to walk barefoot in the hills."

Nature is one of three threads in Barbara's long career of murals, commercial ads, logos, fabric painting, artistic lamps, and acrylic paintings. Just as nature is layered (weather, the leaves and flowers of the seasons), so are her paintings: paint over paint, paint over words, paint over snow.

Another thread is her sense of belonging to "the ancient family of artists." She uses their symbols in her paintings

and invites the artists of old to be with her when she paints.

A third thread is the twining of her two loves: caring for people and doing art. Art is her "passion and bliss," but also a medium for healing. When a client commissioned a painting representing "restlessness," for instance, Barbara painted a horizontal line at the bottom of the painting "to give restlessness a base."

Barbara is retired from commercial work and commissions (though she "might play another season if for the right team"), but you can see her art at 6th and F Streets in Grants Pass. This mural, "The Road of a Thousand Wonders," was commissioned in 1995 by the City of Grants Pass. They paid for the design, but Barbara and her co-painter, Ray Colton, donated their labor as a gift to the city. They painted, in wool hats and layers of long johns, throughout the winter. Barbara will be refurbishing the mural this spring.

Barbara's current project is a series of more than 60 paintings called "Wisdom of the Heart," which she calls "the great spiritual journey of my life." These paintings often come so fast that as one layer dries Barbara starts another sketch. "I am the energy. The energy is me," she says. She recognizes and wants to convey that everything is in relationship: life, death, heart-soul. The series will culminate in a book of paintings and accompanying essays. (It is one of the great honors of my life that she invited me to write those essays.)

Rick Faist

Nineteen years ago Applegate artist Rick Faist, a painter, helped his son make an African musical instrument called a kalimba (thumb piano) from homegrown gourds. With leftover tines he made more kalimbas, which he sold to buy a drum set (he is also a musician). Soon, making kalimbas became a sideline to painting and gradually took over the business. Now, under the name of Thumb Fun Kalimbas, Rick makes approximately 900 a year. Fifteen thousand or so are in the hands of customers worldwide.

Rick can make about three dozen kalimbas in a week, although, he says, it takes all his time all the time. That's not surprising, since making a kalimba the Rick Faist way involves more than 70 steps, from growing the gourds to grinding the keys to tuning the instrument. A true craftsman, he does all the work on every kalimba himself, though his wife, Louann, a weaver and landscape artist, helps with things like making keys, weeding the gourd patch, and selling at crafts fairs. He enjoys

the varied work, he says: it makes painting seem like such sedentary concentration!

Rick cuts sound holes in the hardwood tops of his kalimbas in a variety of shapes: falcon, elephant, salamander, dolphin, or anything else the buyer wants. Though it is not true that the animal shape influences the sound, one boy thought the kalimba with the rabbit-shaped hole played fast and the one with the turtle-shaped hole played slow.

The thumb piano is a quiet instrument, softly played and pleasingly melodic, like sunshine spilling through trees. One woman bought one to play for her father while he was dying. Another customer bought one for a friend in traction. "When we set up a booth at a crafts show," Rick says, "our booth neighbors usually think with dismay, 'Oh, no! Musical instruments!' but then they realize that the music isn't

invasive and adds a pleasant atmosphere." Since the kalimba is played by the thumbs striking tines, it is a good instrument for today's generations, who have grown up texting. They feel right at home with a kalimba.

Thumb Fun kalimbas are unique for the wide range of tuning available: any major or minor scale, pentatonic scales, East Indian tunings—anything requested.

Rick and Louann Faist sell kalimbas at crafts shows throughout the Pacific Northwest, locally at Cripple Creek in Ashland and Great Northwest Music in Grants Pass, and online at www.thumbfunkalimbas.com.

Greeley Wells

When Greeley Wells was in high school contemplating possible careers, he considered what he had been doing all his life (art), what he liked to do (art), and what he was good at (art).

So Greeley (his signature name) became what he was: an artist.

Greeley mostly painted the human figure because, he says, "it is the prototype of exquisite form." He explains that he wanted his paintings to follow the flow of lines. (As he talked, his hand flowed like a shadow across the form of his own body.)

He likes the play of light and dark, the way shadows give a sense of undulating three-dimensional forms in his two-dimensional medium. Greeley frequently painted in shades of gray, which allowed more opportunity for the line to express form without the complication of color.

The past tense of "painted" is accurate because, one day three years ago when



Top photo: Rick Faist at a crafts show with his kalimbas or thumb pianos. Bottom photo: A painter of note, Greeley Wells is now making artistic movies of nature.

Greeley was walking through his woods on Carberry Creek taking pictures with a new iPhone, he thought, "Doesn't this thing also make movies?" With that discovery, his career changed paths. He is no longer a painter but a moviemaker.

Unhampered now by the limitations of two-dimensional art, Greeley plays with time, sound, motion, and realism in the outdoor world.

The art, he says, is in allowing the creek and the tree to catch his attention. Then he tries to capture the layering of experience: the yellow leaves that (next layer) are moving and behind it the creek (next layer) also moving (another layer) and the sun making it sparkle (another layer) and through the leaves in the distance darker forms (another layer) and if he is lucky, a red tree (another layer).


Greeley's movies are quiet. They are slow. The sun spreads over a hillside, leaves twinkle lazily to the ground, the wind blows sparkles on the creek. Greeley wants us to see beyond the "first seeing," which, he says, is mere identification: "This is a maple." He wants us to learn "real seeing," a deeper way of looking. "My movies calm you down, make you pay attention, watch a little bit longer—and see," he says.

Greeley does not miss painting. "Sitting down with paint doesn't hold a candle," he says, to the animated nature of his new art.

Go to www.greeley.me to see Greeley's paintings and to www.youtube.com/user/greeleywellsjr#g/r to see his movies.

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