

# Vista Studios - Laurie B. McIntosh

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over a year she was able to stay in her home with round-the-clock care. But by the summer of 2010, the loss of mobility and the signs of dementia had progressed to the point that forced us to move her to a more skilled care facility.

Agnes lived a long and wonderful life. She lived a full circle of life. She left unanswered questions and unfinished business, as I guess all mothers do, but I believe she knew she had done a good job and she knew she was loved and respected by those who mattered most to her. In the end, she had a family she was proud of. In the end, she still had joy. In the end, she still had love.

After her death, I set out to tell the story of a life lived... of her life lived. I hope to relate to you not just my story, but a universal story that happens every day in families

everywhere. To convey this story through paintings I struggled with whether to make my subjects recognizable and specific or to make them loose and ambiguous. The answer became clear after talking to my friend, Sarah Majors, a singer/songwriter in Nashville. She told me the more personal and specific her lyrics are, the more universal the message. So, I introduce you to Agnes, honestly and personally, and in a way that I hope lets you recognize and know her."

For further information check our SC Commercial Gallery listings, call Laurie McIntosh at 803/319-2223 or e-mail to (laurie.mc@bellsouth.net). For info about Vista Studios or Gallery 80808, call 803/252-6134 or visit ([www.vistastudios80808.com](http://www.vistastudios80808.com)).

## Columbia Museum of Art in Columbia, SC, Features African-American Face Jugs

The Columbia Museum of Art in Columbia, SC, is presenting the exhibit, *Face Jugs: African-American Art and Ritual in 19th-Century South Carolina*, which showcases a collection of African-American face vessels, on view through Dec. 8, 2012.

The Columbia Museum of Art is presenting a very rare exhibition this fall featuring early African-American face jugs, all of which were made in South Carolina in the 19th century. This is the first exhibition in nearly 30 years to bring together a collection of this African-American pottery. Objects in the show come from private and public collections, including the McKissick Museum of the University of South Carolina, the New-York Historical Society, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, among others.

"Our sincere appreciation goes to the McKissick Museum for its support and collaboration, which has enabled us to bring this exhibition to Columbia for the enjoyment of our community and visitors and partner to reach a broader audience statewide," CMA Executive Director, Karen Brosius, said.

The CMA is the only venue in South Carolina on the national tour for the exhibition, which has been jointly organized by the Milwaukee Art Museum and the Chipstone Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting American decorative arts scholarship.

"We are grateful to be partnering with the Columbia Museum of Art this fall to bring to South Carolina an exhibit focused on 19th-century face jugs from the Edgefield District that surely will spark lively conversations about what recent research reveals about these visually compelling objects," McKissick Executive Director, Jane Przybysz, said.

This exhibition is a masterworks show celebrating the aesthetic power of these objects and suggesting new consideration of their uses and cultural meanings. African-American potters produced the ceramic face jugs in the Edgefield District (present-day Aiken County) in the mid-19th century. These expressive faces featuring bulging eyes and bared teeth seem mysterious to modern-day viewers. Although anthropomorphic ceramic vessels have been made for centuries in almost every part of the world, those made in Edgefield are unique. Why do they look the way they do? What did they mean in their own time? How were they used? These questions and more are explored in the exhibition.

That these face vessels were made at all is intriguing. Slaves had no legal or civil rights, nor were they typically permitted to express themselves freely. But 19th-century African Americans found creative ways to sustain their customs and beliefs through hidden meanings in their objects, songs and stories. According to former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, concealed messages about empowerment, secret meet-

ings and the whereabouts of slave patrollers were written into the lyrics of spirituals. Likewise, the African-American folk tales featuring Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox discreetly forecast the downfall of white masters in the guise of innocent stories. Face vessels also may have functioned as cleverly coded objects within the African-American community.

An important early reference to face jugs came from a South Carolina pottery owner, Colonel Thomas Davies. His Palmetto Fire Brick Works in Bath, SC, in the Edgefield District was in operation between 1862 and 1865, one of many production potteries that took advantage of the region's rich clay deposits. At that time, vast quantities of alkaline-glazed stoneware used in daily life, such as storage jars, pitchers, bowls and churns, were produced at a number of these potteries throughout the second half of the 19th-century by enslaved Africans and later freedmen. In contrast, face jugs survive in much smaller quantities and were not part of the main production.

Three decades after the pottery closed, ceramic scholar Edwin Atlee Barber relayed information provided by Davies about the manufacture of face vessels at the Palmetto Fire Brick Works. The jugs made there were described as "weird-looking water jugs" with "hideous" white eyes and teeth. Based on the slaves' known practice of giving objects dual meanings, however, Davies and others may not have been aware of their true purpose. Most of the Edgefield face vessels were too small to hold enough water to quench the thirst of a field-worker laboring under the hot sun. Furthermore, Davies' pottery and the other local kilns mass produced countless large, inexpensive utilitarian water jugs that would have more than adequately served that function.

While the legal trans-Atlantic importation of slaves tapered off after the abolition of the slave trade in 1808, the institution of slavery continued unabated in the South until the Civil War. In 1858, the Wanderer, a New York luxury yacht secretly retrofitted as a slave ship, anchored at Jekyll Island, off the Georgia coast. The ship held 407 slaves, many of whom were from various Kongo societies. Over 100 of these slaves were sent to the Edgefield region, where some were put to work at the potteries. A growing body of evidence now suggests their arrival also served as a key catalyst in the rise of the face jug tradition in South Carolina.

Several characteristics found on Edgefield face vessels strongly suggest a link to the art of conjuring. The white eyes and teeth were made from fine kaolin clay, a material long considered to possess magical powers in West Africa. Kaolin was placed inside of and rubbed onto nkisi containers to activate them. Diviners also rubbed white clay around their eyes and mouths. The kaolin eyes and teeth may have functioned in a similar way on the vessels. Likewise, the sharpened teeth found on some of the

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face vessels mirror African sculpture. In addition to the visual characteristics of these vessels, analysis of their contents and residuals may provide further evidence of their use. At least one example has been found with contents suggesting a link to the art of conjuring.

While the ritualistic use of face vessels in Edgefield cannot be conclusively proven, there is much evidence to propose they were more than just racially stereotypical vessels or amusing sculptural forms. As additional vessels come to light and archaeological and historical research continues, we undoubtedly will be able to add more to the story in the future.

The exhibition is made possible by the support of the McKissick Museum, Charlton Hall Auctioneers, Hennessy, Allen and Marcia Montgomery, Susan Thorpe and John Baynes and Ms. Ann Marie Stieritz and Mr. John B. Carran. Charlton Hall Auctioneers generously provided the printing for the 16-page exhibition brochure.

On Dec. 8, 2012, from 9am-4:30pm, the Museum will host a program entitled, *Unmask the Mysteries of Face Jugs*, with informative presentations and lively conversation about the scholarship of these intriguing and mysterious objects. Registration fee (including lunch): \$75 or \$65 for CMA and McKissick members and \$35 for students. For more information or to purchase tickets, contact Jill Koverman at 803/777-3708 or e-mail to ([koverman@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:koverman@mailbox.sc.edu)). The program was organized by the CMA and the McKissick Museum, with generous funding by the Chipstone Foundation.

For further information check our SC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Museum at 803/799-2810 or visit ([www.columbia-museum.org](http://www.columbia-museum.org)).

Haven't found the article about your exhibit yet? Did you send it to us? The deadline each month to submit articles, photos and ads is the 24th of the month prior to the next issue. This will be Oct. 24th for the November 2012 issue and Nov. 24 for the December 2012 issue. Don't put it off. Get your info to us - soon.

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