

Missouri Folk Arts Program

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I recently visited the Daum Museum in Sedalia, Mo., and had the opportunity to spend a short forty-five minutes alone perusing Lupus Garrett's hyperbolic, psychedelic portraits in a solo show titled *Maximalia*. This mid-Missouri artist's creations are assemblages of garish paints and found objects that he layers upon historic, often candid, photographs. I imagine Lupus Garrett as a *bricoleur*, an artist combining found objects, merging past and present together in new ways. He forges, fiddles, and embroiders upon pre-existing palettes. This metaphor extends for me beyond the "fine arts" and encompasses the traditional and vernacular arts of folk artists.

This time of year, forging, fiddling, and embroidering are often on my mind, especially as the latest group of artists participates in the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program. Once again, Ray Joe Hastings will pass down the art of hand-forged gigs designed especially to fish the shallow, rocky waters of the Current, Jack's Fork, and Eleven Point Rivers in southeastern Missouri. Two generations of fiddlers, from two culturally-distinct regions in Missouri, octogenarian Vesta Johnson and Travis Inman (just half her age), will lead apprenticeships in Kirkwood and Sedalia, Mo., respectively. Dona McKinney will teach her apprentice to design, create, and stitch Southern Plains dance regalia worn at intertribal pow-wows. Meanwhile, Peggy Kinder will teach gourd and peyote stitches, hand-sewing them as an expression of her commitment to conserve the art of traditional Potawatomi ribbon work within her own tribe. Western saddlemaker Martin Bergin returns to the program after a long hiatus to instruct his apprentice in sturdy, intricate stitches and decorative carving for function and flourish. Additionally, Eileen Wolfington's apprentice will learn traditional Mexican



TAAP master artist Ray Joe Hastings of Doniphan begins the process of transforming steel into a "pretty" gig: "A pretty gig is hard to make. A beautiful gig is balanced and pleasing to the touch and has symmetry." *Photo by Deborah A. Bailey.*



The front gable of the abandoned Olden School, not far from Pomona, Mo., has been transformed over time by weather and an industrious crew of hornets. *Photo by Lisa L. Higgins.*



Dennis Stroughmatt will share the Missouri French language, culture, and music of “Upper Louisiana” at a lecture-performance on March 10, 2011 in Pickard Hall. Reception at 5:30 p.m.; performance at 6:00 p.m. Photo courtesy of Artists of Note.

dances, and Don Graves will expand the repertoire of tunes his “walking-cane” dulcimer apprentices learned last year. Each of these artists builds upon a historic moment, layering and embellishing tradition with innovations.

Layering also brings to mind Ste. Genevieve, Mo., and its French neighbors in the Old Mines, or “Illinois Country,” region as I work to coordinate a lecture-performance to complement the Museum’s upcoming exhibit *Ste. Genevieve Artist Colony*. The town itself is another kind of assemblage built on former Mississippian lands by French-Canadian colonists, governed forty years by the Spanish, influenced by skirmishes and trade with Little Osage and Missouri tribes, and then flooded by German merchants

after the Louisiana Purchase. Today, Ste. Genevieve markets itself to tourists as a peaceful, historic French-Colonial town, while it is no secret its most popular dish is kniffle—German liver dumplings.

I wonder then if the 1930s newcomers, the Ste. Genevieve Art Colony artists heard of Pete “Pierre” Boyer (1910-2000) who served as a guide to visiting Franco-Ontarian language and folklore scholar Joseph Médard Carrière. Carrière came in 1934 to document folktales around the Old Mines region just to the west in “Missouri French,” a regional dialect (and another example of assemblage) that includes several English words and whole English phrases. Boyer guided and introduced Carrière to local French speakers. Later in life, Boyer was

recognized in the state and nation as a community scholar who helped to document and conserve “Missouri French” culture. Today, French Creole fiddler (and historian) Dennis Stroughmatt follows in Boyer’s footsteps. He will present a lecture-performance at the Museum of Art and Archaeology on March 10, 2011, adding another layer to the audience’s understanding of the cultural fabric that surrounded the artist colony.

While we lose vital community scholars, like Pete Boyer, it is a pleasure to discover and train the next generation of cultural specialists who have a keen interest to document community arts, promote local culture, and share Missouri’s traditions with a wider audience. The Missouri Folk Arts Program has added a new project—locating and training new community scholars through a series of workshops. The first workshop kicked off in West Plains, Mo., in November—a partnership with the local arts council, community college, community action organization, and community foundation. The workshop included intensive instruction, as well as hands-on fieldwork opportunities with visits to long rifle builders, old-time musicians, and a tour of historic Ozark stone buildings. I served as the driver for a tour of structures in Howell County that were originally built as schools, churches, and filling stations in the 1920s and 1930s. These vernacular structures, crafted by builders out of local materials, are works of art themselves reflecting a local aesthetic and the ingenuity of their builders. Over time, the buildings have been transformed and amended by humans and nature. Decades later, a mechanic’s garage and two churches maintain their original functions, while two schools sit abandoned and another has been adapted into a community center. The Olden School, near Pomona, Mo., sits empty today, elaborately embellished—somewhat like Lupus Garrett’s portraits. Mice, hornets and the weather are its *bricoleurs*, forging and embroidering new layers upon a pre-existing palette.