

# Folk artists' lives fill colorful palette

By JIM CARCHIDI  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

This weekend marks the fifth gathering of folk-art followers beneath the water tower at House of Blues Orlando. Since 1999, the "festival has gained notice and participants.

"Every year it seems to grow," says Sara Adjan, coordinator of Where the Art Meets the Soul. "Each artist ends up telling five of their friends, who tell other people."

With success comes challenges. This year, a committee chose 40 names from 80 applicants. In other years, the artist list was filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

"We have so many talented artists wanting to participate each year, there had to be some sort of procedure put in place," says Adjan.

This year's event boasts the largest roster of new talent so far, with 17 of the 40 artists attending for the first time. The festival features an eclectic range of artists from well-known folk visionaries such as Mary Proctor to up-and-coming talents in their first year of exhibiting work.

Where the Art Meets the Soul will offer creative diversions of all types, with music and children's art workshops scheduled each day. As always, however, the main attraction will be the artists.

"I love the pieces, but what really makes the piece special is the artist who created it," says Adjan. "I love to hear their stories."

## Herbert Hofer

Inspired by faith, personal hardship or a sheer need to create, folk artists are generally without formal artistic training. Although many of them hail from the Southeast, the self-taught spirit is universal.



HOFER

Herbert Felic Hofer studied architecture at the University of Vienna and worked as a department store window dresser. In 1963, he left his homeland of Austria and began traveling through



Europe and Africa in search of adventure.

While working as a film actor in Rome, he watched an artist paint in the Piazza Navona and was inspired to draw for himself.

As he worked, a passer-by offered 20,000 lira (about \$15) for his artwork. With the impromptu commission, Hofer realized his destiny.

"I thought, 'I can produce it myself, sell it myself, so why not?'"

His paintings are inspired by his travels and Miami's South Beach where he now makes his home. Hofer uses a childlike "primitive" imagery that reflects his wish that everyone may find peace and fun in their lives; his work has inspired patrons from Pope John Paul II to Arnold Schwarzenegger. Hofer speaks of a desire to find a "paradise on Earth" but has found true joy in his art.

"I have taught myself not only to paint but to find my own style, that is most important for any artist," says Hofer. "That is where the real happiness comes in."

## Tres Taylor

Originally from Alabama, Tres Taylor collected folk art during his career as a biochemist at the University of California in San Diego.

Well-known folk artist and friend R.A. Miller encouraged Taylor to paint for himself.

"At the time, I was in a very, very dark place in my life," says

## Where the Art Meets the Soul

**What:** Fifth annual folk art festival sponsored by the House of Blues.

**When:** Noon-5:30 p.m. today, 9:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

**Where:** House of Blues, Downtown Disney West Side.

**How much:** Free.

**Where to call:** 407-934-2583.

Taylor, who was unhappy in his work and getting over a failed relationship. "When I started to paint, I felt relieved."

In 1999, Lynne and Paul Bolton discovered Taylor's work while visiting his home and showcased it in their gallery, Primitive Kool. The following year, Taylor left his university job to pursue art full-time.

In 2001, a wealthy Japanese rice merchant, who purchased Taylor's art through Primitive Kool, sponsored a three-month stay in the Japanese city of Aomori, where Taylor worked on a collection of paintings for charity. The Japanese media documented the story; the response to his work was overwhelming.

"They noticed similarities to the work of Munakata Shiko, who was very well-known for his wood block prints," says Taylor.

His travels fuel his vision, but Taylor's primary inspiration is his faith.

"Painting is a very spiritual thing for me," says Taylor. "God

gave me something that gave me back my life; what better way to serve God than to use this talent."

## Angela Studer

Angela Studer describes herself as a "farm girl from Ohio." Born in Toledo, she attended Northwestern University in Chicago. During that time, she befriended students from the Chicago Art Institute.



STUDER

"They took me to my first art exhibit," she recalls. "I looked at things differently from then on."

In 1998, she combined her interest in art with a love of jewelry to make gifts for the teachers who worked with her son, Stewart, who has Tourette's syndrome. She would later enter, and win, juried art shows such as one at the 2002 Ohio State Fair.

Studer's creations are wire wraps — precious and semi-precious stones that are assembled and held together by wire. The pieces are the result of talent and experience but also of an intuitive approach to her craft.

"I let the stone itself dictate the type of wire that I'm gonna use, whether I'm going to twist the wire."

The balance and beauty of her pieces make Studer reflect



**'Spiritual thing for me.** 'Angels All Around You' is an example of the work of Tres Taylor (above). He was a biochemist before turning to art full-time.

on the balance and beauty of life, and she deeply contemplates each piece as she works.

"I used to think I was odd," she jokes. "But when people began to make these connections without me telling them, I thought, 'Well, this is curious!'"

## Robert Seven

After a difficult year that saw the death of his mother, the breakup of his marriage and a loss of employment, Robert Seven turned to art as a way of making a living and changing his life.

The Asheville, N.C., artist's most popular creations are whimsical characters made of forks, spoons and serving dishes, which he calls flatware designs.

"My fork and spoon project grew from playing the musical spoons," he says. "It grew to a full-time occupation, but the true root of that was my love for music."

Seven expanded upon his musical inspiration with a line of homemade instruments. The "sewer-flute," for example, is modeled after the Australian didgeridoo with a body made of plumbing pipes.

Seven's interactive approach to his art mirrors the spirit of the festival, the idea that art is for everyone and everyone is welcome.

"Any opportunity I have to get attention is an opportunity for me to give attention."

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**In tune.** Robert Seven is shown with his 'sewer flute,' made from plumbing pipes. It's an example of his musical inspiration.