

Willow Oak Tree Exhibit

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Cover photographs by Shannon Williams
Tree drawings throughout by Toni Carlucci



The Willow Oak Tree Exhibit

Curated by Abraham Tesser

Lyndon House Arts Center

Ronnie Lukasiewicz Gallery

August 28 - November 18, 2021

Athens, Georgia

Abraham Tesser

Curator's Statement¹

Why the “Willow Oak Tree Exhibit”? This exhibit celebrates a tree; nay, a dead tree; nay, a dead tree whose carcass has mostly rotted away. And, here you are, dear reader, participating in this celebration. And, you are not alone. We are all tied to the environment. Trees, in particular, seem to hold a special place for many of us. There is an undeniable beauty, even majesty, associated with them as they age. Some of us want to hug them²; others simply enjoy their shade and fruit; and the woodworkers among us can't wait to see what is inside of them! So, perhaps, honoring this majestic oak provides a resonant opportunity for us to experience that connection.

But, this is not any tree, nor trees in general, that we are celebrating. We are honoring a particular tree. The Lyndon House has been an important community art center for Athens and its environs since 1974. The lives of countless members of the community have been enriched through visits to its galleries, classrooms and studios. A huge willow oak tree, more than a century old, was sentinel and beacon to all who visited. Unfortunately the tree had to be removed in 2016. So, it is this heritage tree, in particular, that we celebrate. And, we do so because of its association with the Lyndon House Art Center and the Athens community.

Putting the show together.^{3 4} How might we fittingly remember the tree and its connection to the Lyndon House Arts Center? An art exhibit at the Lyndon House using wood from the tree seemed like a wonderful idea when I agreed to curate the show. As a community organization, The Lyndon House is not only a great venue for exhibiting art but it also supports local artists. Supporting local artists⁵ is a lofty goal but are there enough people in this community “space” to generate the quality of work in wood that a good show demands? Not to worry. Indeed, there are many more talented artists in the area than we could possibly have participate.

Recruiting was no problem. Each artist that we approached was well established locally. Each had exhibited in this area. And, importantly I very strongly admire the work of each. Although a few people dropped out along the way for various reasons, the show still features the work of fourteen artists!

The elephant in the room. It never occurred to me to worry about the wood. Surely the log had been safely “stored”, i.e., still intact, off the ground, and covered. Regrettably, none of these expectations were met: The log had been cut into 3' - 4' sections, it was left in a field, on the ground, uncovered for years, and much of what was originally harvested was gone. What was left had been affected by weather and fungi. In short the wood was rotten and unusable for most traditional applications⁶. What do you do if you get a lemon? You make lemonade.

1 A curator's statement is a very personal thing. So knowing a bit about the author will help you to understand the agenda, to interpret the words and to judge their credibility. I am not a professional artist and I am most certainly not a professional curator. I am an avid woodworker, a serious studio furniture maker, and a person who has the capacity to be moved, sometimes deeply, by the beauty, cleverness/playfulness, or technical accomplishment of a creation.

2 If you want to hug a tree, you may enjoy reading the following two best sellers: *The Overstory*, a novel by Richard Powers; and *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate - Discoveries from A Secret World* by Peter Wohlleben.

3 I am a guest curator for this show. My host, the Lyndon House Arts Center, and in particular their professional curator, Beth Sale, could not have been more supportive or more helpful. The exhibition would have been impossible without Beth's help. She has my deepest gratitude.

4 The show has benefitted immensely from the help of the Supporters and Donors listed on the 28 page of this booklet. We couldn't be more grateful for their generosity. They are part of this community so if you know them, please thank them as well.

5 “Supporting” local artists is a bit misleading in this context. Participating artists donated their time to create brand new pieces specifically for this show. In a real sense, support is flowing from the artists to this community effort by the Lyndon House more so than vice versa.

6 We are grateful to Oneta Woodworks for helping us rescue the wood that remained. They did some milling, drying, and distribution to participating artists.

Indeed, the wood was simply unusable for a couple of artists. But all of the others recognized that the weather and fungi had either added character, texture, and color to what remained. Or the problems could be worked around. Of course, the association of the tree and the Lyndon House remained a driving force in the work produced for the show. But for many of the artists the condition of the wood was a significant, if not **the** significant driving force in what they produced.

I am astounded by the differences among artists in how they dealt with this apparent problem in the material they were given. I saw three primary responses: One group of artists did not treat the material as wood, i.e., they ignored its structural properties. One artist, for example, treats the wood as simply a token representing the history of art and design during the tree's life time. Another uses the wood, not as a piece of "lumber", but simply as a weight. And yet another treats the wood as a simple relic of the tree, a relic that can help memorialize the tree and what it meant to the community.

A second group of artists used their remnant of the tree as "lumber". They simply incorporated some of the flaws into their work. One artist, for example, did a carving in which some of the rotten areas are worked around but others help to define part of the figure being carved. A couple of artists made table tops of the willow oak wood that, very self-consciously, uses compromised features of the wood as design elements. A third group of artists selected only those bits of their allotted wood that were relatively free of rot for their piece. Turning punky wood on a lathe is almost impossible. So, the wood turners in this show opted to work on the small pieces of wood that were sound, making miniatures, or using turned pieces of the willow oak as small elements in a larger context. Still others salvaged small, relatively sound pieces of the wood and then glued them together to provide a larger, more usable blank.

Enjoy the show. The show has had some unique difficulties. The artists in this show contended with compromised materials and the show was delayed a year because of COVID restrictions. Despite these difficulties, the work displays exciting flights of imagination and creativity. There is much beauty in the structure of the pieces and even in the natural degradation of the wood that the artists choose to show. In addition, over the run of the show, you will have the chance to enjoy several enhancing events including opportunities to meet, learn from, and talk with many of the artists. We hope that the Willow Oak Tree Exhibit will connect with that part of your soul given over to art and to nature and that it will have provided an enriching experience.

Abraham Tesser, Guest Curator



Peter Bull



I was born in England. I have been a woodworker for over 40 years. My journey started with architectural woodworking and restoration. After working for a variety of architects, cabinetmakers, sculptors and artists, I started my own business. I have been in business for over 40 years. I became a design build craftsman, building art boxes, furniture, cabinetry, architectural details, doors and timber frames.

Trees are our environment. Their beauty surrounds us. Every tree has a story, some very short, some very silent. This tree has an extended and unusual story. That story started before my intersection and continues in dialog with many pieces of work from this willow oak. I am adding to its full life.

I requested enough material to build a small table. I was surprised with the material that was presented to me. Not material that I normally work with, but doable. Exploring ideas with materials is a process of imagination and growth. Normally I want to use the best material that I can procure, sometimes shipped in from somewhere else. This time the material selected me, the opposite of my history in woodworking. The challenge of using wood that is degrading, checking and becoming dirt. I had to stabilize the rotten and bug infested areas with consolidant. The need to stop the degrading process.

This piece is a representation of my current work incorporating paint, carving and dimension. The willow oak has put a twist on the outcome.



Tad Gloeckler



Tad Gloeckler is a Professor in the Lamar Dodd School of Art at the University of Georgia in Athens, GA. Gloeckler has been teaching for 25 years (eighteen years at UGA), and was in architectural practice ten years prior to teaching. Before starting his career in art, design, and architecture; Gloeckler worked on conservation initiatives with the National Forest/Park Service and Fisheries Departments. Gloeckler's art/design projects intend to encourage viewers to reexamine familiar objects and surroundings, cultivate a curiosity of earth life forms and processes, and contemplate unique mediations of nature, design, and human existence.

A heritage tree can really define a community. How do you see your work honoring this tree?

I honored the Willow Oak Tree with a story of six families that embraced the tree's existence. I estimated 1900, as the year Lyndon House Willow Oak Tree might have sprouted from the earth; and we know the tree was taken down in 2016. My Willow Oak Tree project maps an historical timeline with a fictional narrative of six generations of families that interacted with the tree over that 116-year period. Each family designed and built an artifact (a tree swing) for the Willow Oak Tree. The swings were inspired by an art and/or design movement (Dada, De Stijl, Structure as Ornament, Minimalism, Memphis, CNC Technology), that coincided with the time of artifact creation.

One artifact is built at full-scale and constructed of the salvaged wood from the Lyndon House Willow Oak Tree. All of the other artifacts are built to a scale of 1:6. The scale model artifacts outline an imaginary narrative history of tree. These models occupy space under a canopy created by boards from the Lyndon House Willow Oak, just as full-scale original artifacts would have been sheltered by the thriving oak tree.

project.



To what extent did the physical state of the wood, i.e., partial decay, influence the direction of your piece?

The quality and quantity of willow oak wood that I selected/received critically impacted ideation and design. The small supply of wood was cupped, warped, split, spalted, rough sawn, and in some locations, structurally compromised by decay. Preparing the boards for any kind of complex assembly, gluing, or joinery; would have resulted in an unacceptable forfeit of material. The wood was imperfect; it was also beautiful! Understanding and embracing this duality, directly informed project conception.

Design process considerations were:

- honor and embrace the Willow Oak Tree's existence.
- simultaneously feature flawed condition, and attractive surface of the willow oak wood.
- technically manage the imperfect quality of the willow oak wood.
- give a very small supply of willow oak wood great hierarchy, yet still expand scope and complexity of the project.

My project features boards salvaged from the Lyndon House Willow Oak Tree. The willow oak boards were barely altered from the condition received by the artist (two boards were slightly trimmed to match their lengths, and four ½" diameter holes were drilled in each board). The combination of two oak boards could structure the

live load of a seated person. Rope traverses the underside, and long-axis, of the wood for additional structure; then moves upward through four openings to align and stabilize the two boards (no glue).



Would you say your piece for the show is a good example of the kind of work you are currently doing or did the nature of the show move you in a different direction. In either case, what is it about the piece that makes it appropriate for this particular show?

In general, there is a narrative component that is clearly presented in my work, but that narrative is subordinate to the experience of an object, or interaction with an object. In the Willow Oak project, narrative supersedes object(s).

Is there something in your piece, perhaps obvious, perhaps a subtle detail, that you hope people will notice? Why is that aspect of the piece important?

I would hope that viewers see the displayed objects as a datum, and subordinate to the contemplation of what this tree might have experienced during its 100+ years of existence.

Is there a set of thoughts and/or feelings that you hope your piece evokes? What might those thoughts or feelings be?

The narrative I created is fiction. I would hope that viewers are curious about the unrecorded life and history of the Lyndon House Willow Oak Tree. And possibly, a feeling of regret; for knowing so little about this amazing organism. Maybe viewers experience a subtle form of activism - inspired by the touch of soft, supple leaves in early spring, observing color and moisture transformation through the summer and fall seasons, identifying birds that visit, what songs they sing, and where and when they nest, mapping the locations squirrels bury acorns from the tree, etc.



Walt Groover



My name is Walt Groover. My interest in art has been pretty much lifelong, always drawing throughout my childhood, and sometimes carving wood. In college I majored in art and design. After college I wanted to see Europe, so I went there and after 6 months my money ran out, and I was still curious. I was fortunate enough to find work with an architect group, and then with a graphic design studio in Germany. They allowed me to work and travel off and on which enabled me to continue experiencing different cultures and art throughout Europe, Northern Africa and Scandinavia for three years. Upon returning to the US I worked with a design and advertising agency for a couple years then started a design studio. Other than the small bit of sculpting I did in college, I began to sculpt in wood in 1998 while

still working as a designer. In 2017, semi retired as a designer, I began earnestly working in sculpture. Recently I have started painting.

Why did you agree to participate in this show?

I felt honored when Abraham Tesser invited me to participate. I also like the culture of The Lyndon House, their sense of community, and how they make art accessible to all people.

Would you say your piece for the show is a good example of the kind of work you are currently doing or did the nature of the show move you in a different direction. In either case, what is it about the piece that makes it appropriate for this particular show?

I would say that my piece for the show is a good example of the kind of work I currently do. My work revolves around strength and vulnerability, and both of those qualities can usually be found in the pieces I've finished. That holds true as well with this sculpture, in my opinion. I named this piece The Guardian, which is representative as the protector of the ideals and culture of The Lyndon House.



Cal Logue

Cal Logue is Josiah Meigs professor emeritus of communication studies, UGA. He grew up in small towns in Alabama, and has enjoyed carving scenes from that experience. (See loguelane.com for pictures of some of those carvings.)



When Ms. Beth Sale mentioned there might be a show of works constructed from the trusted tree, there was no hesitation; here was something an old carver could do. Went out, got a few pieces of dirt-crustured wood from the sleeping Willow and began whittling away.

Usually I decide early-on what is to be carved, such as a woman drawing water from a well or man hoeing weeds. But somehow the Willow had a bark of its own: an obstinate burr, meteorite print, amusement slide, and mysterious tunnel.



Reid McCallister



Born in Chicago, I have lived, worked, and gardened in Athens for close to 50 years. I received a BFA in Painting and Drawing from the University of North Carolina, followed by an MFA from UGA. Early influences at UNC were abstract expressionist painters such as Willem de Kooning and Philip Guston, as well as the early Pop artists. Graduate work evolved from painting on canvas to making sculptural assemblages in the realm of Robert Rauschenberg and John Chamberlain; then, after graduation, more toward Thornton Dial and Lonnie Holley.



Living in the Boulevard neighborhood since the late 1970's has given me a great appreciation for the beauty and symbiotic presence of large oaks. These stately trees provide shade for residents, home sites for animals and nutrients for the soil. Two large Post Oaks at the back of our property sadly succumbed to age and needed to be taken down. It was surprising when the arborist counted their growth rings to discover that both oaks were over 150 years old. These sentinels to history were saplings at the time of the Civil War, sited on farmland outside the city limits of Athens—thirty years before the electric trolley linked the new neighborhood named Boulevard to the city, bringing optimism and excitement to our town.

Owning an early 1900's house has forced me to learn enough carpentry to keep up with the continuous repair of aging double sash windows, rotting walls, out of date electricity and plumbing, etc. The rehab process has given me great appreciation for the beauty and strength of southern yellow pine, rough-hewn lumber from a sawmill in Lulu, Georgia brought to Athens by mule-drawn wagons. The hands-on repair process has provided me a large hoard of leftover material and a bent toward putting the pieces together.

The towering Willow Oak on the Lyndon House grounds lived to be over 120 years old. This tree saw many changes come to Athens including the first electric lights and trolley, two World Wars, the Voting Rights Act, the establishment of Lay Park and the formation of the Lyndon House Arts Center.

"Time Machine" is an expressive, metaphorical piece meant to honor the life, times, and beauty of the beloved Willow Oak. Also living on in the wonderful color photography of Shannon Williams, it is gone but not forgotten.



Larry Millard

Larry Millard has shown nationally and internationally throughout his career. He is Professor Emeritus at The University of Georgia having taught sculpture and design. He was sculpture area chair and served as director of the University of Georgia Studies Abroad Program in Cortona, Italy, for 8 years. He spent 1981-82 as visiting professor at The Ohio State University. He has had 22 solo exhibitions and has been included in over 230 group exhibitions and numerous public art venues. He has received several awards, grants, and commissions for his creative work and teaching. Currently, he serves on the board of directors of the Mid-South Sculpture Alliance and recently (2015-2020) the Greater Augusta Arts Council. His time is divided between Athens, GA, and New York, NY.

Larry Millard received an MFA in Sculpture from Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri; a BFA in Sculpture from East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee; and a Certificate of Historic Preservation Studies from The College of Environment and Design, The University of Georgia, Athens.



I got into woodworking by helping my father create stringed musical instruments from about the age of 10 in 1960. I was his "human clamp," holding instrument parts while he worked on them-sanding, cutting, gluing, and clamping.

A heritage tree can really define a community. How do you see your work honoring this tree?

This work is about what is hidden or unseen in the marvels of nature. Within all things are wonderful realities we often never think about or see.

How does incorporating the Willow Oak into your practice pay homage to our natural environment?

I have tried to leave the outside of the work as "natural" as possible, what I have done is inside and simply a minor part of pointing out the possible wonders of nature if we look, seek, investigate, cherish, and enable.

Wood is the uniting material here. How would you describe your relationship to this material and its origins?

Wood is so common to citizens of the USA and, in fact, to the world. Humans have used it for shelter, tools, and various instruments. In all probably wood is used by humans more than any other material.

What portion of the Willow Oak tree did you select? A branch, a burl, the bark? Why? And what did you make out of it?

It seems to have been a vertical part of the trunk, it is what was left and available.



Why did you agree to participate in this show?

An invitation by Abraham Tesser could not be turned down, I consider it an honor to be included.

To what extent did the physical state of the wood, i.e., partial decay, influence the direction of your piece.

Overall, I feel that we are largely reflexive in our creation of things. We respond to “stimuli,” so the nature of the material dictates what I do as an artist. I may select a material or item with which to work, but I am always a partner with the material, shaping it and it shaping my thinking and the next step toward a notion of completion.

Would you say your piece for the show is a good example of the kind of work you are currently doing or did the nature of the show move you in a different direction. In either case, what is it about the piece that makes it appropriate for this particular show?

This is a tough question. The limits of what we think and how we respond to a theme or material is usually distinctive to each individual. The work is driven by the time, the place, the material and

at the same time, the “limits of my thinking are particularly mine. The notion of “The Willow Oak Show” pays homage to the tree, Lyndon House, Athens, and Georgia; therefore, using the wood from the tree says, “This is a distinctive object that has grown, flourished, and died in this place, it has been present when all kinds of activities have occurred, now it is to be acknowledged and recognized for its treasured nature as a signifier for this place.

Is there something in your piece, perhaps obvious, perhaps a subtle detail, that you hope people will notice? Why is that aspect of the piece important?

Beauty is everywhere, bask in its radiance.

Is there a set of thoughts and/or feelings that you hope your piece evokes? What might those thoughts or feelings be?

Not everything is what it appears to be, always look, seek, investigate, cherish, and enable.

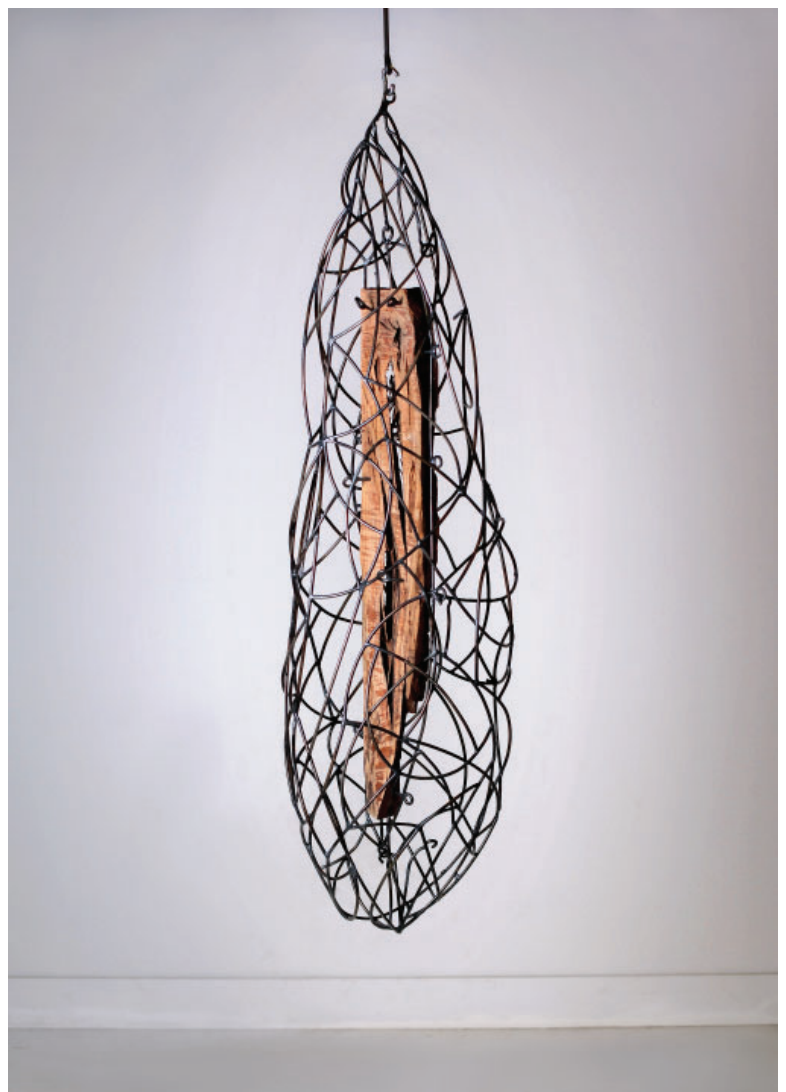


Duane Paxson



For me, the Willow Oak project brought to mind the destruction wrought by hurricane Opal in 1995. Devastating vast areas in Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee, the storm felled many magnificent, centuries-old trees. Around my home in Alabama, I witnessed mighty canopy oaks lying on the ground, their limbs strewn about like dead warriors. The Lyndon House oak was like one of these-- a “saintly” tree, dead before its time.

I therefore decided that the length of wood given me was a kind of “relic,” for which I would make a reliquary patterned after the ancient tradition of containers designed to display and to protect the sacred remains of a holy person, such as bone fragments or remnants of clothing. The analogy of the wood to a fragment of a saint was accentuated when I learned that the tree had been struck by lightning years before it was cut down, traces of the strike apparent to a trained eye. This fiery blast from nature mirrored the spirit invading an ordinary person to create a saint.



Just as the often fragile relic is placed unaltered inside an ornate encasement, I decided to leave my piece of wood much as it was given to me. From a practical point of view, however, the rotted wood made alterations almost impossible. I then created an ornate welded steel housing for it.

The shape of the steel encasement is significant, moreover. Cocoon-like, it suggests the notion of rebirth. Just as a saint is reborn into eternal life, so, too, will this tree live on in the art made from its substance.

Leonard Piha



My name is Leonard Piha. My deepest interest and passion for making art originates from what I find. A dead tree, pallets, glass jugs, rusty tin, old windows and cardboard. All these materials are easily found, usually thrown away and most importantly can be given a new purpose in life. I am drawn to materials that most people regard as “garbage”.

The sculpture that I built with the willow oak tree is a continuing image of a “tinker man”. A non fictional character who once played a part in our ancestors lives.

The origins of “tinker man” come from a variety of thoughts and experiences. I have made things all my life. My fascination with pots and pans, jugs, religious figures, being able to carry all my belongings and fixing things culminated into the character I call tinker man. There was once a job for a person to make house calls, known as “tinker man.” This person would come to your house and sharpen knives, fix pots and do general repair on anything metal. I immediately was hooked on this concept. Finally the outstretched arms was an image I once saw our rabbi do while giving a certain blessing. The hanging images symbolize the tassels of a prayer shawl. These motivators helped create “tinker man.” When I was invited to the willow oak show,

the wood from the tree and my obsession with tinker man provided me with the perfect opportunity to make a tinker man using this very special wood. I had never made a tinker man using wood. Thus the challenge was born.

Tinker man allows the viewer to travel down their own memory lane. For example: the trunk = traveling, hanging tin objects = “oh, my grandma use to have one of those”, the memory of someone coming to your house and sharpening knives or fixing pans, and the open arms hinting that everyone has their own private feelings about religion.

The engraved outline of a tree pays homage to the loved tree that once was there.



Richard Shrader

I have been a fine craftsman for over 30 years, crafting and designing various projects. My main focus was woodworking when I started but I now have incorporated other mediums like steel and iron. I would describe myself as a functional artist working to create something that is not only elegant but practical and functional. My work has ranged the gambit from custom furniture to carved pieces to working on movie sets. I love to learn and with each different project I work on the more I widen my range of skills and knowledge.



Working with trees has been a large part of my professional life. I have worked on every aspect of processing wood. Starting from cutting the tree down, sawing the timber and kiln drying the

lumber. Then hand crafting the wood to create a finished piece of furniture. The piece of Willow Oak that I am working with is a new challenge. In the design phase, I have had to decide how to best showcase the wood. I am using a bark inclusion as the centerpiece of the book match. It was a hard decision to decide what to remove due to rot or decay and what to leave to show the character of the wood. The flaw of the inclusion shows the beauty and strength of the oak. I used an epoxy finish to stabilize the wood and metal to support and showcase the oak table top.



Jim Talley



My name is Jim Talley. My career was a high school math teacher, followed by teaching adults in a technical college. An interest in wood working began as a boy, helping my father in his shop. He was a finish carpenter and I learned very early to appreciate the variety, textures, grains and colors of wood. After taking some university art classes in wood turning, I slowly began acquiring wood turning machinery, making my own tools, and learning turning techniques. In the last several years I have become known among wood turners for miniature goblets and other miniature pieces, most of which are on the scale of 1/12 inches.

My piece for this show is a collection of miniature vessels, turned on the scale of 1/12 inches.

It is an example of my current work as a wood turner. I have always been interested in creating

pieces of turned wooden art from wood that has some nostalgic, sentimental, or heritage history associated with it. Therefore, I wanted to use some of the Willow Oak to help commemorate the tree that was a stately part of the Lyndon House history. Because these pieces are so

small, it wasn't necessary for me to use any specific area of the tree. Each vessel is made from the oak; some are enhanced with finials made from African black wood. I hope that the viewer will appreciate the form and design of each piece and be intrigued by its miniature size.



Abraham Tesser

In 1999, after 30 years of teaching and research in psychology and interdisciplinary administration (Institute for Behavioral Research), Abraham Tesser retired from the University of Georgia as Distinguished Research Professor Emeritus. Tesser says, “I loved what I did at UGA but after retirement I was seduced by the beauty, warmth and potential for transformation of wood.” For the last two decades he has been a serious student and practitioner of the art of studio furniture making.

Tesser sees deep similarities between psychological research and studio furniture making. There is a craft to be mastered before either studio work or research can be done well. And, when either is done well there is an undeniable aesthetic component that is often labelled “beauty”. Beautiful work, whether scientific or artistic, resonates with and enriches our souls. To the maker, whether scientist or artist, that resonance is addictive. “It keeps us tied to the lab or the studio doing whatever we can to produce that next high.”



A heritage tree can really define a community. How do you see your work honoring this tree?

My piece is a music stand built from the wood of the willow oak tree. So, at least a bit of the tree lives on in this new incarnation. The willow oak, in its most recent living history, stood as sentinel to an important Athens art venue. Music is a crucial part of the Athens art scene so a music stand seems to extend the Willow Oak mission. The tree is also honored by the shape of the music stand; the stand takes the shape of an aging tree including voids, patches of decay, etc.





There is also a “meta” or indirect sense in which the music stand pays tribute to the tree. Each of the artist participants in this show honors the tree with their work. In turn, the music stand pays homage to this very special group of artists. The graphic element on the tray of the music stand shows the canopy of a Willow Oak tree and the “fruit” of the tree is past work of most of the participating artists!

Why did you agree to participate in this show?

The Lyndon House is a prestigious art venue in Athens. I love showing my work. So when I was asked to participate as an artist I was delighted.

Sometime after committing to do a piece I was invited to curate the show. I am a fan of the Lyndon House and thought that having a show focused on a heritage tree, using the actual wood from the tree, was a fabulous idea. Moreover, I believe that wood as an art medium doesn’t always get the exposure it deserves. The Lyndon House is an entity of the local government; it serves the community and its focus is on

community artists. Happily, this community has an abundance of artists that can use wood to create work that recognizes the importance of a heritage tree in our lives. Beth Sale, the LHAC Curator, and I talked. Those conversations assured me that I would have a Lyndon House partner to work with that is sensitive, experienced, responsive, and smart. I have some curatorial experience so I knew that taking this on would be time and energy consuming. But it was a show I wanted to see and there was good institutional support. So, I said yes.

To what extent did the physical state of the wood, i.e., partial decay, influence the direction of your piece?

The wood used by the artists in this show had been exposed, unprotected, to the weather for years. It had serious evidence of fungal activity. That activity produced areas so structurally compromised, so rotten, that one could push a finger into the wood. Fungal activity also produces markings on the wood called spalting. It is as if God took a pen and ink and decorated the wood. When spalted wood is sufficiently dried it remains structurally sound and the spalting enhances the beauty and character of the wood surface.

I wanted my piece to use the wood of the Willow Oak in a structural way. This wood could yield only modest lengths and widths that are structurally sound. So, my original design idea, a Japanese welcome gate cabinet, was untenable. However, I had been making a series of music stands and a music stand is the right scale for the wood we had. The stand is shaped like a tree and many of the “flaws” in the wood are visible in the “tree” trunk and roots. These flaws lend character to the piece and tie it directly to the willow Oak Tree.

Is there something in your piece, perhaps obvious, perhaps a subtle detail, that you hope people will notice? Why is that aspect of the piece important?

The graphic element in my piece, the music tray, pays homage to the artists that participated in this show. As a woodworker I admire and am inspired by the skills and creativity of each of the participants. And, I am grateful to each for agreeing to participate in the show. Their work is a tribute to what the Willow Oak tree stands for, art in Athens. Their work also bears testimony to their grace in volunteering to channel their time and talent into such a community project. This is what I hope people will notice, understand and appreciate.



Jim Underwood



I started working wood at an early age. Simple carvings with a pocket knife, nest boxes for rabbits, helping my father build slab & pole buildings for the farm. I remember spending one Christmas vacation and at least two summers acquiring refrigeration crates from the new Safeway, breaking them down, then cleaning up the lumber for use as an addition on to our house. I learned a great deal about hammers, nails, screw drivers, crowbars and channel lock pliers, and how to use them to drive nails “the wrong way”.

Later on I received training as an automotive technician, and repaired cars for a living. As a young father I didn’t have much time or money to build up many woodworking tools or skills, but I added to my tool collection little by little.

After 14 miserable years I left the automotive industry and got into industrial woodworking when a friend started a flooring plant. He asked me to come on as a maintenance man, but before long I was also in charge of machine setup, operation and training.

After that it was a natural transition into a cabinet shop where I became defacto IT person and all around technical guy- including some basic programming and CNC support. I immersed myself in the design software and became an advanced user in the ensuing 20 years. I am now working by remote for a upscale cabinet shop in North Carolina as a Cabinet Vision Design Engineer. Sounds fancy, huh? It just means I know how to use the program to do the CAD/CAM work to make cabinets.

During that time I joined Classic City Woodturners where I have served as Secretary, Newsletter Editor, Vice President and Program Director. The relationships and knowledge I’ve gained from this association are greatly appreciated. I enjoy wood turning, carving, and pyrography.

A heritage tree can really define a community. How do you see your work honoring this tree? How does incorporating the Willow Oak into your practice pay homage to our natural environment? Wood is the uniting material here. How would you describe your relationship to this material and its origins?

I love trees, and pretty much everything about them; the colors, textures, and shapes, the leaves, bark, wood, fruit, and shade. The diversity and sheer numbers of them astound me. Did you know there are around 1,000 species in North America alone? Did you know that the wood from trees is found in almost every color of the rainbow; from highlighter yellow to royal purple?

I have loved caring for trees, harvesting nuts and fruit, and using the wood to make useful and artistic products; cabinets, structures, ornaments, treenware, ornaments and artwork. I like the feel of wood, the colors and textures of wood. I like working it, cutting, carving, smoothing it to a high luster.

It’s a fantastic material and the properties of each species has its own unique property.



To what extent did the physical state of the wood, i.e., partial decay, influence the direction of your piece?

Oh man. I received a section of branch I suppose. It was about 24" long and 16-20" in diameter. It was soaking wet and full of beetle larvae. The outer 3-4 inches was rotten punky wood not worth saving. I cut that all off, leaving about a 10" diameter chunk which I split in half and promptly painted to prevent it splitting from drying too fast.

Unfortunately even that didn't help. It began splitting after a few months. Even after 2 years it was still soaking wet at 25% moisture. In desperation, I began cutting boards out of the worst half, and attempting to air dry them fully stickered. I finally resorted to buying 5 gallons of Denatured Alcohol and soaking it all for about 2 weeks, then removing it for drying. Unfortunately that sped up the drying and the splitting. I now have quite a few ½ thick boards of varying widths that are mostly around 9% moisture content. The upside is that all the bugs are surely dead.



Would you say your piece for the show is a good example of the kind of work you are currently doing or did the nature of the show move you in a different direction. In either case, what is it about the piece that makes it appropriate for this particular show?

The nature of the wood definitely is having an impact. I'm only going to be able to use it as accent pieces rather make the project completely out of the acquired wood. I'm also trying a new skill for me; segmented woodturning. We will see how it turns out.

Update: Unfortunately the original project proved to be too ambitious so I've switched to something less complex. But even now the wood is still shrinking. Fortunately microwaves and air conditioning have mitigated the moisture problem, and I now have enough dry wood to make a different project.

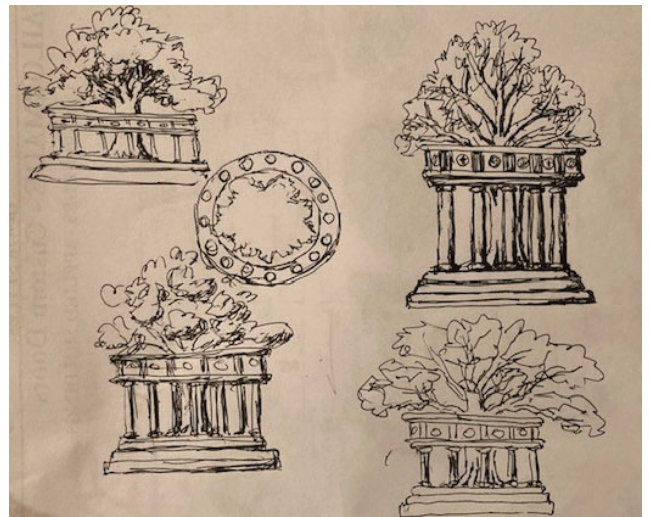
Is there something in your piece, perhaps obvious, perhaps a subtle detail, that you hope people will notice? Why is that aspect of the piece important?

Originally I was to carve the willow oak wood, but now that it's inlaid, I can't bear to take away from the character. The way it has been cut allows the ray flecks to really stand out.

Is there a set of thoughts and/or feelings that you hope your piece evokes? What might those thoughts or feelings be?

Beauty of creation and the brevity of life.

Here is a concept sketch. Originally the architectural structure was supposed to be all Willow Oak, but as it was still too wet, I decided to make only the columns and accent pieces of Oak, and the segmented rings of white Maple. The tree itself will be made from Alder and probably textured with pyrography. The tree will be mounted on the floating bottom. The floating bottom will help prevent the rings from self destruction as the wood expands and contracts.

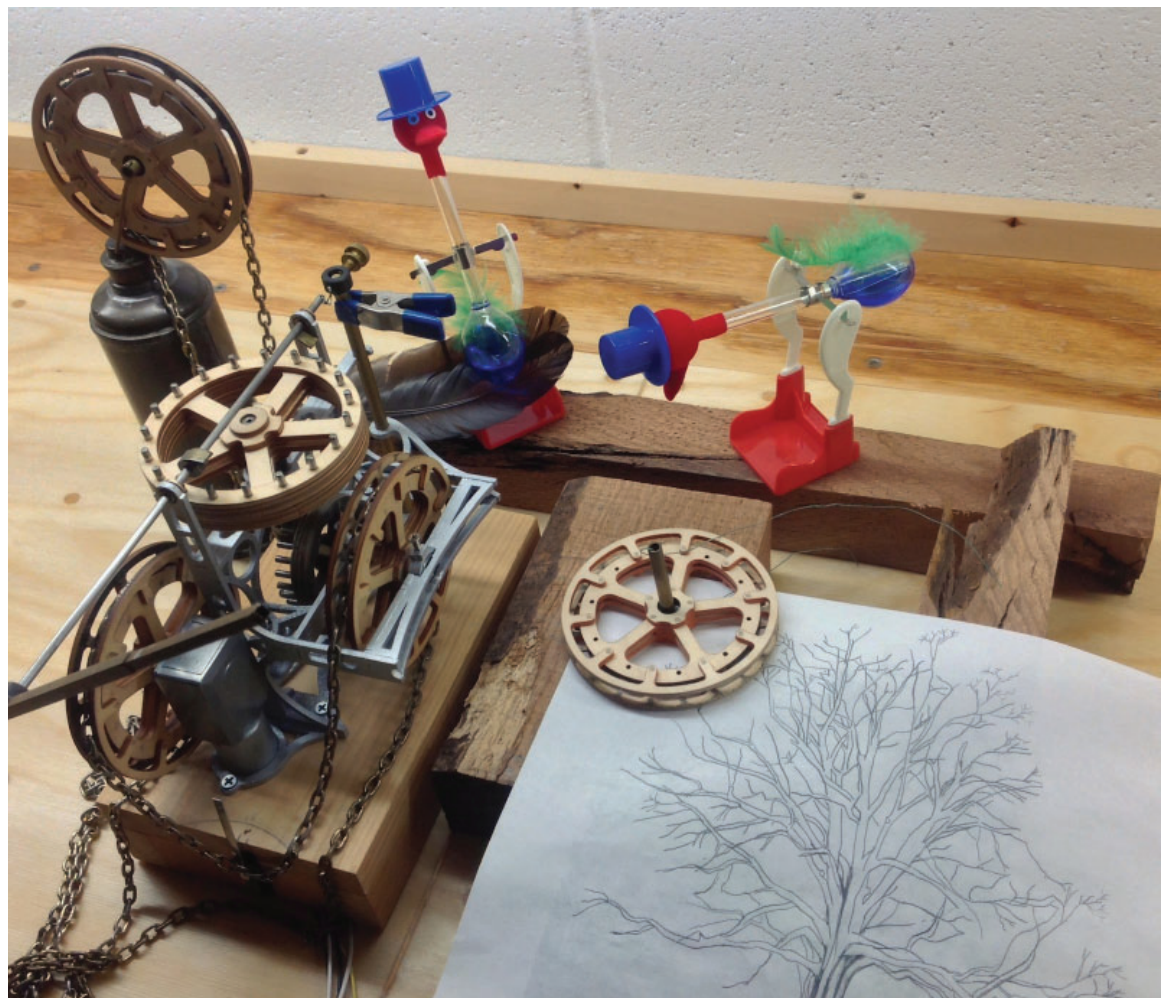


Martijn van Wagtendonk



Making objects is thinking for me. The landscape that emerges from this shaping offers me a horizon that bids to see yonder, undoubtedly cultivating further fruit for thought.

And hence, this object, the Willow Oak Tree, has its matter of which it was made passed around. Through fashioning its wood, I ponder about that horizon.



Tom Wenzka

My early childhood yard was bare and bleak, but some trees were slowly planted for shade and fruit. I protested loudly when a couple had to be felled; my Pa cut and preserved for me a small section of my favorite peach tree's trunk in 1961. It sits on my bookshelf still.

Entrusted with a Boy Scout knife, I began whittling, gifting my first serious piece to my Pa at age 15 (still have it, following his passing). Stories hidden within felled trees fascinated me as I learned to chip away covering grains. Many works have been carved from beloved trees: Nativity characters from family Christmas trees, a French rolling pin from a small shade tree that prematurely died and was mourned, a tragic historical event from a fallen cedar at that site. Or from found chunks of wood that promise a story or a character within them.

The invitation to work with the stock of the Willow Oak arrived with a sweet account of how generations of artists and lovers of art had thrived as they arrived to view or who created art beneath its limbs and leaves. Inspiration enough!

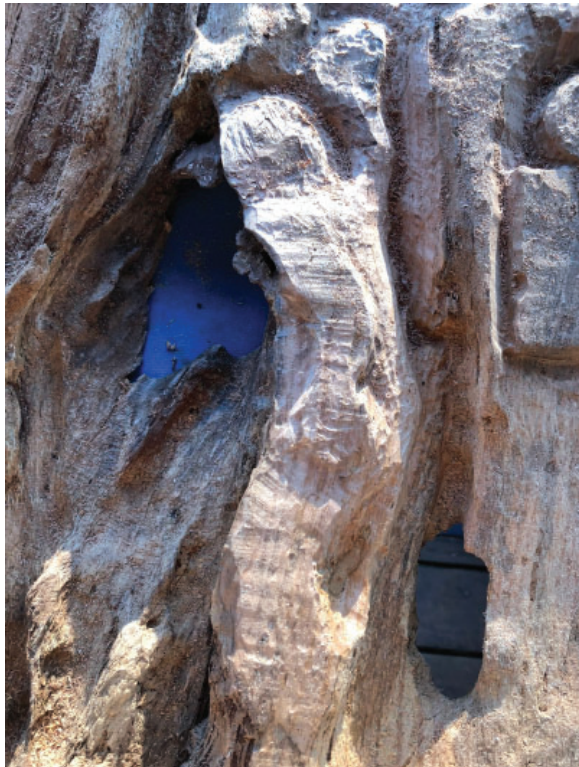
Only four pieces of the Oak remained to choose from, but the quirks and obvious aging of this piece clearly carried stories from those generations.

Since retiring from nursing and teaching nursing students, I've been living on a heavily wooded property. Carving occurs under this canopy. It's been an honor to be asked to chip out some of the tales held in the grains of the Willow Oak.

We were tasked with honoring the tree that had stood over art studios, classes, exhibits, and spectators over a past century. The chunk I chose, with

its splits, holes, and rot, looked to me to encase those activities. Wood carving, for me, is about removal of the stuff that hides the story or a character in that story.

That lower left character wiggled out first, quickly emerging at the entrance to that intriguing hole. Only the back of the head is visible. Note that the face cannot be completed. What does that say to you?



Andrew Saunders

When I think about the Lyndon House Willow Oak, I can't help but think of it as the elder statesman of trees for our community. While Athens may be known for the President's Ginkgo on Prince Avenue, the Tree That Owns Itself over on Dearing Street, or the Moon Tree on Dougherty Street, I'm certain that few trees in Athens have witnessed what that old oak tree saw in its day. To say that the tree was large is an understatement. It was a monster! It had limbs larger than many trees and it arched out over the front lawn of the Lyndon House like it could not wait to cast its shade upon those who visited.

As a Certified Arborist, one of the most common questions I receive is "how old is my tree". Many people want to believe that the pine tree in their front yard is at least 100 years old, and has certainly known Athens since it was a quaint college town known for its bustling textile industry and local mills. Inevitably, I can watch the dismay creep across their face when I report back that the tree in question is likely only 40 or 50 years old. I cannot tell you how old the Lyndon House Oak was, but I can tell you 100 years was just another milestone for it. The tree can be seen on the 1938 aerial photo records for Athens, and I believe the tree was probably of impressive size then. I suspect the tree watched on as our town struggled forward with items like the Civil War, the Great Depression, the social movements of the 1960's, and yes, even the infamous Widespread Panic concert of 1998. As we debated who we were and how we would conduct ourselves as a community, the tree watched on. And yet, the tree also watched on as I worked to establish who I was in this community. While certainly not nearly as significant as the major milestones it had already witnessed, it was there for the start of it all.

As a 22 year old recent college graduate, like others, I was trying to determine exactly how I might establish roots in a town known for changing populations on a four year cycle. The first step for this process was to get full-time employment in the community; a task that would not be simple for someone with a degree in natural resources. I was fortunate enough to land a part-time job with the ACC Landscape Management Division working to support their fledgling Community Forestry Program. Rumor had it that they were about to hire a full-time forester, but to that point, the program had been built upon the knowledge of consultants and the labor of college students. My boss assigned me a task working with a school program educating them about the value of natural resources at the Lyndon House.

Beneath the shade of the old oak tree, I worked for a few hours with a bunch of elementary school kids teaching them about resource competition by throwing color coded Tootsie Rolls beneath the oak tree (blue for water, brown for soil, green for nutrients, and yellow for sunlight of course). With each round, inevitably, some of the kids would come up short on Tootsie Rolls (it helps if you don't eat them) and end up being "culled" from our front yard forest. I watched as the kids began to understand a bit more about resource allocation and the idea that as trees grow larger, there have to be fewer of them if the resources have not increased. At the end of the day, my boss said something along the lines of "if the promotion was in question before, you've certainly earned it today".

And earned it I did. A few months later, I became Athens' first Community Forester. Fittingly, my first official assignment was to expand a lightning protection system being used to protect the Lyndon House Oak from major storms. I was fortunate to be the tree's caretaker and I always enjoyed stopping by to give it a quick inspection. Over the years, I was blessed to set down enough roots that Athens became home. I worked on trees across the state, but secretly, I always had a soft spot for the Lyndon House Oak. I was dishearten when it finally could not stand the test of time any longer and needed to be removed; yet I was then encouraged to see how the Lyndon House Arts Center worked to honor its legacy. As I think back on the Lyndon House Oak, I'll always remember a hot summer day with giggling kids, overflowing Tootsie Rolls, and a moment in time where the tree watched on as a wet behind the ears college kid found his way in our community.

Andrew Saunders, Athens Clarke County Central Services Director

Nancy Lukasiewicz

It is difficult to explain, even harder to understand, but impossible to deny that we sometimes are touched by silent beings in our daily lives. At least that was the case for me with the “Lyndon House Tree.” I hesitate to try to pin it all down in my mind because this feeling is very illusive and so strange. Mostly, over the years I have just collected mental visual snapshots of memorable moments.

For over forty years I worked beside the Tree at the house on the hill at the north end of Jackson Street in downtown Athens. It was only a short period in the life of the Tree, but most of my working life. I have so many memories, but a few come to mind at this time.

During the annual Harvest Festivals at Lyndon House in the 70’s and 80’s, I recollect senior citizens benefitting from its shade as they showed school children about making quilts on a group frame. All their faces were so happy, dappled with sunlight as it filtered through the leaves.

I have fond memories of my late husband, Ronnie Lukasiewicz, founder of the Lyndon House Arts Center, reminiscing about annual juried show receptions, the first of which was held in 1974. He recalled artists gathering under the Tree debating the merits of exhibited works in the competition.

I also remember coming to work one morning and seeing a young couple in loving conversation surrounded by daffodils on the bench under the Tree. With them as scale for the scene I could see what a huge host the Tree was - they only made up about one tenth of its height.

Once we needed to measure the Tree’s circumference so Celia, Caroline, Shannon and I joined hands, barely able to reach around the trunk! The tree got a good hug that day.

Enduring over countless decades, it became a particularly beautiful stand-alone tree. It was such a stately, symmetrical, perfectly proportioned tree! It has truly been missed. So many visitors remarked about its splendor and pondered over the many things that had happened while the Tree was growing up.

I am grateful to Lyndon House Arts Center for this tribute to our beloved Willow Oak Tree!

Nancy Lukasiewicz, Lyndon House Arts Center, retired



Photograph by **Shannon Williams**: *Harvest Festival, 2012*

Shannon Williams



Winter 2016



Spring 2011



Summer 2011



Fall 2014

Shannon Williams, Lyndon House Arts Center

List of Works

Peter Bull

Small Table, 2021

Willow oak and white pine with a finish of paint and lacquer

11" w x 26.75" h x 19" d

Tad Gloeckler

Tribute to Willow Oak Tree (circa 1900 – 2016), 2021

Alternative architecture

34.5" w x 25" h x 15" d

Walt Groover

The Guardian, 2021

Willow oak wood

6.5" w x 25" h x 3.5" d

Cal Logue

Untitled, 2018

Willow oak wood

18" w x 9" h x 10" d

Reid McCallister

Time Machine, 2021

Willow oak wood with collected materials and ivy

36" w x 72" h x 12" d

Larry Millard

ROUGH, 2021

Willow oak wood, paint, artificial gold leaf, adhesive, hardware

26" h x 16' in diameter (when closed)

Duane Paxson

Willow Tree Reliquary, 2021

Willow oak wood and welded steel

16" w x 59" h x 16" d

Leonard Piha

Tinker Man, 2021

Willow oak wood, tin, mirrors, and steel

60" w x 64" h x 18" d

Richard Shrader

Willow Oak Coffee Table, 2021

Top is book match willow oak crotch impregnated with epoxy casting resin, legs are mild steel pipe and hammered rod
26" w x 18" h x 36" d

Jim Talley

Miniature vessels, 2021

Willow oak wood and African black wood

Various sizes, 1/12" scale

Abraham Tesser

When Art Grows on Trees, Music Stand, 2020

Willow oak wood, photo transfer to oak plywood, with Shellac finish

22" w x 42"-58" h x 15.25" d

Jim Underwood

Turning Time, 2021

Willow oak wood, Alder wood textured with pyrography, and white Maple

6" diameter x 10" h

Martijn van Wagendonk

Untitled, 2021

Charcoal, mixed media

Dimensions variable

Tom Wenzka

...they grew, they grow

Willow oak wood, wood hardener, and tung oil

13.4" w x 38.6" h x 2.1" d

Schedule of Events

August 28, 2pm - Guest Curator **Abraham Tesser** introduces the Willow Oak Tree Exhibit, in the Community Room at the Lyndon House Arts Center.

September 9, 6pm - Gallery Talks with **Duane Paxson, Jim Talley & Tom Wenzka**

October 21, 6pm - Gallery Talks with **Cal Logue, Leonard Piha & Richard Shrader**

October 30, 1pm - 3:30 pm - **Willow Oak Tree Symposium** with **Peter Bull, Tad Gloeckler & Larry Millard**. Join us for an afternoon of presentations from the Willow Oak Tree Exhibit artists in the Community Room at the Lyndon House Arts Center. The Symposium will be hosted by Guest Curator, **Abraham Tesser**. Peter Bull is a nationally known timber framer. He will talk about *Timber Preparation*, i.e., how does one start with a tree on the ground, prepare the timber and end up with a useful structure. Tad Gloeckler, an architect and Professor of Art at UGA will talk about *Narrative in Sculpture*. He will address questions like, why is narrative important in 3 dimensional art? How does an artist infuse an object with narrative? How does an art consumer decode the narrative? Larry Millard's career as a sculptor and his "retirement" have put him into the thick of creating, planning and recruiting public art. Larry will talk about *The Creation and Consumption of Public Art*.

**The Lyndon House Arts Center &
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thank the following donors:**

Todd Emily

Hedgerow Farm

Highland Trust Partners

John & Tricia Lyndon

Kathy Prescott & Grady Thrasher

Material Culture & Arts Foundation

Smith, Adcock and Co., LLP

Angela D. Meltzer, CPA

Abraham & Carmen Tesser



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