

# Southern Living

## Enjoying Spring

Fluffy and Light  
Angel Food Cakes  
You Can Bake

Three Takes on  
A Screened  
Porch

Pork  
Tenderloin  
Tonight

A Secret  
Garden Out  
Your Window

**BEFORE  
& AFTER:**  
5 Ideas for  
Every Front  
Yard

BONUS  
SECTION  
GEORGIA  
LIVING: PEOPLE  
& PLACES

It's Your Turn:  
Host an Easy  
Springtime  
Party



(From left) Desmal Purcell, Anthony Faris, Bryan Ghiloni, Jean Gray Drake, and Melissa Cartaya (plus three others) make up the Stillmoreeroots Group. **BELOW, LEFT:** Bridget Conn combined an apple, beeswax, rice, string, graph paper, and a wooden box for this untitled piece left in the woods.



## Artists Among the Trees

A creative group of young artists with rural ties collaborates as the wild and woodsy Stillmoreeroots Group. By **Joe Rada**

**D**ozens of pinecones, painted red, sway in the breeze. They've hung from wire strung among tree trunks near the town of Stillmore for a while now, long enough for the red to fade and the wire to sag. Why they're here—and why a tag dangles from each, marked not with a price but with a little written thought—are questions you can answer any way you wish.

The same goes for other odd arrangements that slowly deteriorate in place. Ashes piled on a shaky table. A fallen limb coated neon yellow. Rusty tin sheets sheltering assorted rocks and candles. Sticks and purple flowers bundled with white ribbon hanging at eye level. This

is art that by its very nature raises questions. And this art-dotted patch of piney woods offers a window into the fascinating world of the Stillmoreeroots Group.

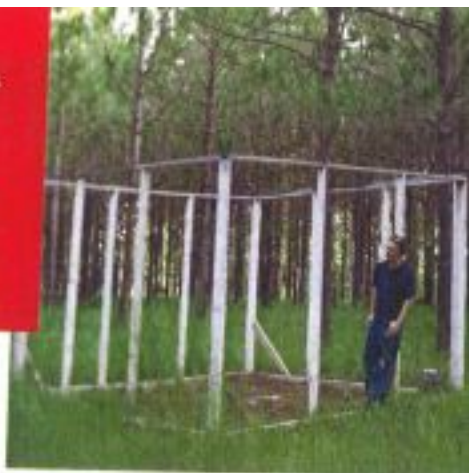
**Makes You Think** Getting people thinking is both a goal and a hallmark of the Stillmoreeroots Group, a loose alliance of rural Georgia artists ages 26 to 32. Eight core members often collaborate on temporary works displayed in nontraditional settings, such as at the turpentine still in nearby Portal.

Their favorite rural locale: a pine grove on Stillmore land that member Desmal Purcell's family has farmed for five generations. "I grew up in these woods," says Desmal, a mixed





Left: Bridget Conn's red pinecones still hang in the woods long after the art show for which she strung them there, room. This simple frame of a room becomes a gallery without walls.



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media artist who teaches at East Georgia College in Swainsboro. "Now they are common ground for the entire Stillmoreroots Group. We are all either from around here or live nearby. We hold an annual show called Art in the Woods, literally using this patch of trees as a gallery without walls."

**No Reason To Stop** "When the group formed in 2002 before the first Art in the Woods show, we weren't thinking long term," says Anthony Faris, who with fellow photographer Bryan Ghiloni runs Gallery RFD in Swainsboro. "We created a lot of site-specific installations on the Purcell tree farm, enjoyed working together, and kept coming up with reasons to collaborate."

"Even set in the woods, the show drew a good crowd," says Jean Gray Drake, a painter and elementary school teacher who explains that the artists rarely name their pieces, letting the art speak for itself. "Ever since, there's been no reason to stop. We keep organizing shows and projects, all of us or in twos and threes. Everyone in the Stillmoreroots Group inspires everyone else."

"We've become one big, happy family," Anthony says.

**Art Advocates** "The Stillmoreroots Group creates art that viewers can connect to within an environment that allows artists and audiences to really relate," says Bridget Conn, who runs the group's Web site. (There are her red pinecones from a past show.) "Exhibiting in unusual settings does that. If we provoke dialogue and inspire community involvement, we achieve our goals."

"The idea of taking art out of traditional gallery settings appeals to all of us," Deanna says. "It gets people involved." *—Turn to page 44*



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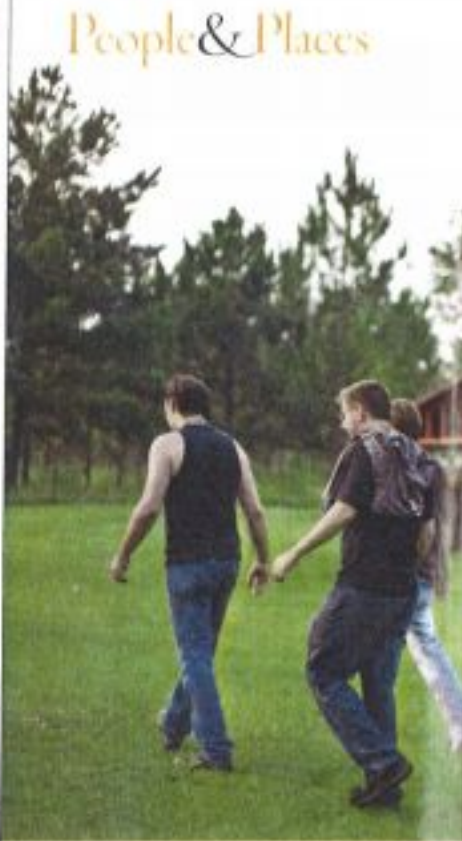
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**Inspired by Nature** Several members teach. One runs an art gallery. One curates a museum. Another is director of downtown development for nearby Swainsboro. All consider rural Stillmore a source of inspiration.

Jean Gray once created an audience-participation piece, sewing taffeta squares to a sort of free-form quilt suspended on clotheslines. Desmal adds to a years-in-progress work, a hut made from defunct-farm-building tin that lets pinholes of sunlight pour onto stones from around the world. Anthony once created an installation exploring agriculture with a rack full of free fruit for viewers to interact with.

Other members—Melissa Cartaya, Nick Nelson, Bryan Ghiloni, and Brandon Tatom—stay expressively busy too. "We all bring out the creative energy in each other," Bridget says.

**Coming Home** Most met while studying at Georgia Southern University, Savannah College of Art and Design, and Armstrong Atlantic

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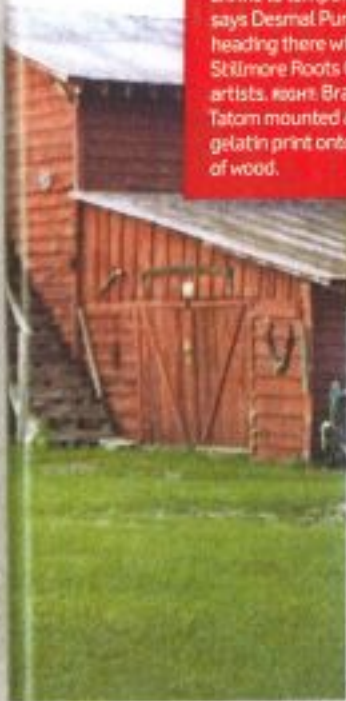
**Southern Living**

um. "The woodlot behind my grandmother's barn has become a sort of shrine to temporary art," says Desmal Purcell, heading there with fellow Stillmore Roots Group artists. **room:** Brandon Tatom mounted a silver gelatin print onto a slice of wood.



**"We hold an annual show called Art in the Woods, literally using this patch of trees as a gallery without walls."**

DESMAL PURCELL

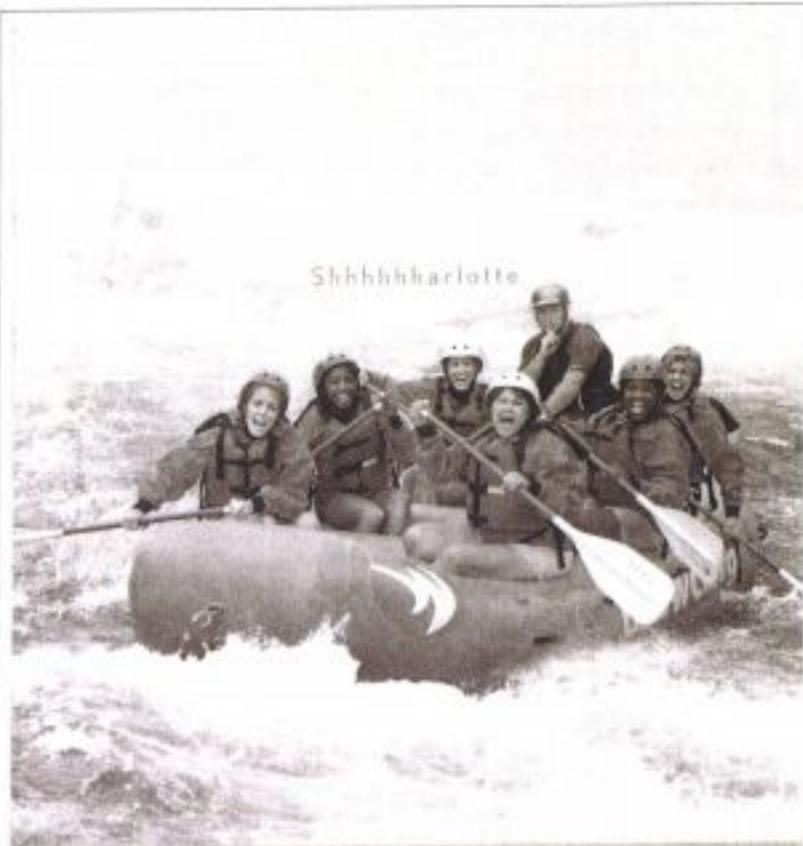


iversity. "We scattered for a and I thought we would just do egs in different cities and stay in Desmal says. "Then we drifted d with thoughts of bringing art and communities we love. That me our guiding principle. we started simply as a meeting place," Desmal as. "Through our collabora- Stillmore has become as much of mind as an actual place. It's when we do a show here, it's a ning." •

### ing Down Roots

eroots Group: [www.stillmore.roots.com](http://www.stillmore.roots.com) or (478) 289- members mount art-related ops, lectures, studio tours, ins, festivals, and more. rworks regularly at vari- ing ia galleries, including RFD, 106 North Green uinsboro, GA 30401; [www.rfd.org](http://www.rfd.org) or (478) 237-6873.

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