

# experimental ROOTS

By Allison Hersh  
for Savannah Morning News



"There is a great distance between what is and what will be," by Jean Gray Drake



"embracing" mixed media  
by Mary Sanderson (NOTE:  
lower case "e" is intentional  
in title)

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amed after a small town just outside Metter, Ga., the Stillmore Roots Group consists of 10 emerging artists — all of whom are under 30 — who periodically join forces to exhibit their work in traditional and unconventional spaces across the Peach State.

The group, formed in September 2002, features artists working in a variety of media, with an emphasis upon experimental painting and edgy photography.

"We're a group of individuals gathered together to bring change," says Desmal Purcell, a member of the Stillmore Roots Group who lives in Statesboro. "We're trying to bring about a change in perception of the viewer's

relationship to art. We want the viewer to become as involved as we are."

The Stillmore Roots Group has exhibited eclectic, multimedia work in art galleries in Macon and Statesboro and holds an annual outdoor Spring Equinox Show at a managed forest in Stillmore. The group marks their inaugural exhibit in Savannah with a group show at S&L Gallery, which will be on display through Friday.

A recent art opening on a cold, rainy Friday night drew more than 400 people to the Liberty Street gallery.

"We think that this is an exciting concept to bring to Savannah," says Larry Gibbs, co-owner of S&L Gallery. "You don't often get a group of 10 artists as varied and talented as this group. I think it's a good thing for Savannah."

The Stillmore Roots Group show features 70 new works in a bold, fearless exhibit which reflects the members' collective desire to push the envelope of creativity.

From Bridget Kahn's distressed photographs depicting talismanic arrangements of objects to Mary Beth Sanderson's tiny square paintings embellished with colored thread, pencil shavings and charred rice paper, this group show offers a wide range of approaches to contemporary art.

"Everybody is trying to expand their horizons and try something different," says Anthony Faris, a Stillmore Roots

IF YOU GO

**What:** Stillmore Roots Group Show  
**When:** through Friday  
**Where:** S&L Gallery, 108 E. Liberty St.  
**For more information:** Call (912) 447-8553 or go to [www.stillmoreroots.com](http://www.stillmoreroots.com)

Group member who lives in Savannah. "We ask people to take a journey with us. We want people to take the time to look into the art and perceive it."

Although the exhibit has no pre-set themes or agendas, a number of creative connections emerge when viewing the show as an organic whole.

Recurrent preoccupations include the violence of representation, the relationship between death and beauty, and the camera's power to document people and places on the fringes of mainstream society.

Highlights from this ambitious show include Nicholas Nelson's intricate "Nocturne" mixed media pieces which enshrine dead beetles, dried mushrooms and other relics of the natural world upon altars constructed of wood panels and found wood planks studded



"Untitled" photo, by Desmal Purcell

## THE ARTS

# Roots

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with rusty nails. His "Landscape Collage" series affixes dragonflies and butterflies to hand-colored paper by embedding them in splattered wax, highlighting the fragility of the insects' ineffable gravity-defying beauty.

Mary Beth Sanderson embraces the freedom of creating mixed media paintings by applying paint in thick, heavy brush strokes to a mirror, creating a wide ring of cracked peach paint encircling a teal, aquamarine and black center that looks like a massive unblinking eye. In "Rain through Vein," she uses straight pins to attach tiny wax paper shreds to the pale surface of a dusty pink painting, simulating

the delicacy of white rose petals.

Photography dominates the Stillmore Roots Show, however, with the majority of the artists using the camera to create visual poetry, chronicle the majesty of nature or offer insight into alternate worlds.

From Desmal Purcell's vivid, primal images hung in pristine, meditative natural settings to Bryan Ghiloni's black and white digital print series documenting the pockmarked and hooded faces of people sleeping on the subway, the exhibit showcases the remarkable versatility of the medium itself.

Anthony Faris turns his camera to a wooden bench at an unknown bus stop, exhibiting 72 silver gelatin prints which chronicle the antics on the bench from 9 a.m. to noon. Like time lapse photography, an analog clock

mounted to a brick wall above the bench ticks off the time of day as people whisper, smoke, think and laugh while waiting for the bus. The print series documents an extemporaneous sense of community that forms in a most unlikely place.

Brandon Tatom creates a series of saturated color photographs, each of which are hung in four individual glass panels pushed together to form one composite image. With equal dexterity, he focuses the viewer's eye upon a single shimmering cloud reflecting off the armored exterior of a glass office building and upon a stand of trees captured in silhouette at sunset as the sky radiates an electric tangerine glow.

"This is art that should satiate all the senses," says Purcell. "There are no limits."