

*Keeping you in...*



# The Loupe

The Loupe is the newsletter of the Department of Art and Art History, a NASAD-accredited department in The University of Alabama's College of Arts and Sciences, published in the fall, spring, and summer semesters. Please send correspondence to Rachel Dobson, Visual Resources Curator, rdobson@crimson.ua.edu.

The newsletter of the  
Department of Art and Art History  
Box 870270  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama  
<http://art.ua.edu>

**Fall 2009**

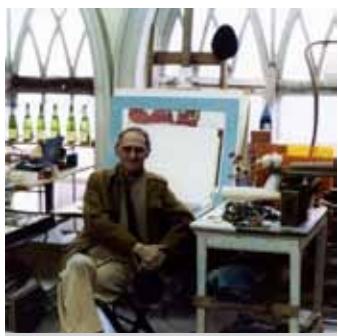
## AL SELLA REAPING HIS REWARDS

Alvin Sella, professor emeritus of painting, received two awards this spring recognizing his long and distinguished career in art and teaching. In April, the Arts Council of Tuscaloosa presented him with the Druid Arts Award - his second from them - in the visual artist category. To paraphrase the criteria, the award recognized the quality of his body of work, his contributions to his community and to his art form, and the recognition he has brought to the arts in Tuscaloosa County.

In May, at festivities in Montgomery, the Alabama State Council on the Arts awarded him their prestigious Governor's Arts Award given every other year, for his work and his "contribution to the arts in Alabama, across the U. S. and beyond." About this year's recipients, the press release noted "Their contribution over a sustained period has greatly enhanced the cultural landscape in Alabama." Sella attended with his wife Maria and son Nick.

A question about how he felt about all the recent accolades and attention brought a big grin to his face and a string of familiar expletives. A couple of

sources claimed that the video about Sella shown at the ceremony was by far the best. It consisted of unflinching and direct observations by old friends and UA colleagues. Former student, Karen Graffeo, smiled when she said, "Al's teaching was very spirited and bold and...it had a baffling effect on students." A UA dance group also presented a humorous theatre and dance interpretation of his art and ubiquitous bicycle-riding.



Sella in his Clark Hall studio,  
ca. 1977. Photo by Keyser Wilson.



Al Sella in his studio, 2009.  
Photo by Keyser Wilson.

## WELCOME BACK!

Welcome to all our students, faculty, and staff, new and returning. New graduate students in art history are Emi Arnold, Mary Benefield, Christopher Langley, Brandi Moore, and Angela Scott. New incoming graduate students in studio art are Amy Feger and Aynslee Moon. Please also welcome our new art history instructor, Jenny Blount, who received her MA from UAB in the spring, and is taking Mary Anna Brown's place.

Welcome to our new studio faculty! Chris Jordan, our new digital media professor, comes from Sage College in Albany, New York. Besides teaching, he is owner of Jordan Photographic and cofounder of Digital Artist's Space, an artist-centered digital fine art services bureau. Jordan received his MFA in Photographic Arts from Rochester Institute of Technology in 2004.

Sky Shineman, our new painting professor, comes from Ohio State University, where she was a lecturer, curator, and gallery preparator at her alma mater. She has taught digital video creation, and worked as a studio assistant for Ann Hamilton. She received her MFA in painting from Ohio State University in 2007.



Our Art Staff: Vicki Rial, Brittni Jones, Mark Stevenson, Rachel Dobson, and Jennifer Maddox at the CASSA luncheon on the Bama Belle in July. Photo courtesy Jennifer Maddox.

(*lōōp*), n. 1. a magnifying glass used by jewelers, esp. one which fits over the eye. 2. a jewel of perfect luster or brilliance.



## DRAWING ON THE INSIDE *An interview with Jamey Grimes*

Jamey Grimes couldn't stop to talk the other day because he had to get to prison. I laughed, but when we did sit down to talk, it became clear that he is very serious about teaching art at William E. Donaldson Maximum Security Prison in Bessemer and at Brent Correctional Facility. And he is discovering unexpected rewards from his participation there.

Last fall, Kyes Stevens, founder and director of the Alabama Prison Arts and Education Project (APAEP), asked Cathy Pagani if she knew of any studio faculty who might be interested in teaching in Alabama prisons. Jamey Grimes is the first UA art faculty to participate in the program, but APAEP would like to increase that number.

Stevens began the project in 2003 by teaching poetry. She then added instructors to teach creative writing, Southern and African American literature, African American theatre, photography,



Jamey Grimes teaching drawing at Donaldson Correctional Facility.  
Photo courtesy Kyes Stevens.

Alabama history, and art classes. The program began under the auspices of the Center for the Arts and Humanities in the College of Liberal Arts at Auburn University. According to the website, there are now more than 35 writers, artists, scholars, and others teaching in twelve correctional facilities in Alabama. Currently several UA faculty teach writing courses in participating Alabama prisons, and the MFA writing program has a graduate scholarship whose recipient is solely devoted to teaching in the prison arts project. The project has also developed general reading libraries in 18 prisons.

*"If I come to class [at Donaldson] and I'm not prepared, I feel like a jerk."*

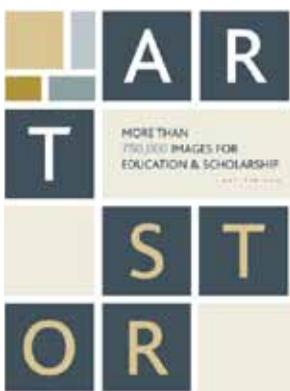
Grimes began at the Donaldson facility in the spring of 2009 teaching a drawing class. He now teaches Drawing I and II there. In July he took on another class at Brent Correctional Facility, a lower security prison in Bibb County.

When asked what it's like teaching art in a maximum security prison, he brims with stories and insights, but some things he won't talk about. Instructors are taught to be careful about the prisoners' privacy, and are asked not to talk about particular students. Training with Kyes Stevens at APAEP was vital. "We had a day-long training session, and got a big packet of things to read. She came with me my first day." Stevens says that it is "completely normal [for instructors] to be nervous." Stevens requires new and experienced teachers to attend the training session held at the beginning of each new term. Not only do the new instructors benefit from hearing from the old hands, but, she noted, "it creates a community."

Experiencing the prison world can be eye-opening. Grimes reminds us of the obvious, "[Walking into the prison] you realize it's a different world." He said that the security issues in some respects are "more technical" than scary. It is often more about the logistics of getting from one place to another, for example, during "the count" of prisoners, which might take place at any time. At that point, you just have to stop and wait until the count is done.

Grimes teaches in the prison's chapel area, which he says is an ideal location. There are tables, chairs, and space to spread out. Some inmates have jobs in the chapel, and some are in management positions and help him set up for the class.

Their materials are limited, but adequate for their current needs. Funding comes from grants from many agencies. The project began with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2003. Now the Alabama State Council on the Arts,



## ARTSTOR NOW AT UA

The University of Alabama has joined UAB and USA in offering ARTstor to its online community. ARTstor is a digital library of nearly one million images in the areas of art, architecture, the humanities, and social sciences with a set of tools to view, present, and manage images for research and pedagogical purposes. It is now accessible through Gorgas Library's database page (<http://www.lib.ua.edu/>). Also on the database page are links to a Help page and short tutorials on ARTstor. In October, there will be an in-person training session for faculty and grad students. Please contact Rachel Dobson, or Jill Grogg (jgrogg@ua.edu or 348-7994) for more information.

## ALUMNI NOTES

After three years of teaching the survey of art history as GTA and instructor, **Mary Anna Hudson Brown**, MA 2008, is moving to the Crescent City where her husband will practice law.

**Jeff McMillan**, MFA 1995, had a one-man show at PEER on Hoxton Street in London in July and August. The installation, supported by The Henry Moore Foundation and titled "The Possibility of an Island," is made entirely from paint-by-numbers paintings acquired by McMillan over the last 15 years from thrift stores or more recently on eBay.

**Bryce Speed**, MFA 2005, was in a two-man show at Gallery PS122 in New York City in May and June. In 2008, he participated in a group show at Plane Space Gallery in New York. He teaches art at Central Community College in Columbus, Nebraska.

This summer **Dale Wilson Kennington**, BA 1956 (art history and design), is having two concurrent exhibitions of her paintings – wall paintings and folding screens – at the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art in Auburn. Her paintings appear in more than 25 public collections including that of King Carl Gustav XVI of Sweden and the Federal Reserve. In 2006 she joined UA art alumni **Frank Fleming** and **William Christenberry** as Arts Ambassadors appointed by Gov. Bob Riley.

Alumni: please send your news to *The Loupe*, Dept. of Art and Art History, Box 870270, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487 or [rdobson@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:rdobson@crimson.ua.edu)

## TIMELINE of the Department

**1949** Sixty years ago this year | Richard Brough is head of the department. Angelo "Jack" Granata, Joseph Bolt and Frank Engle are all hired. Four years before, in 1945, Richard Zoellner had "established one of only two departments of fine art printmaking in the Southeast at The University of Alabama. In 1945, UA's art program was part of the department of home economics. Zoellner was one of a new generation of UA art professors, including Dick Brough, Frank Engle, Jack Granata, and Joe Bolt, who developed the independent department of art with a strong studio focus." (UA Media)

**1959** Fifty years ago this year | William Christenberry earns his MA in art from The University of Alabama, and continues teaching in the department part-time.

**1969** Forty years ago this year | David Mathews is named president of the UA at age 33, the youngest to hold the office. Douglas E. Jones (now professor emeritus of geology) is named dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Elizabeth Walter (now professor emerita of art history from UNA) has been working as Gallery Coordinator; she receives her MA in studio art. She will later become chair of UNA's art department.

Sources: Department of Art and Art History Archives; UA Media.



William Christenberry works on a project in a three-dimensional design art class in 1954-1955, probably taught by Jack Granata.  
Photo courtesy of the W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama.



## LOOK HOMeward, MR. CHRISTENBERRY

*Alumnus William Christenberry celebrates his 50th anniversary at the UA*

William Christenberry, an internationally renowned artist and 1959 alumnus of The University of Alabama Department of Art and Art History, will lecture on his art on the UA campus on November 5. An exhibition of his works at the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art will be on view from November 5 through December 22, 2009. This year is the fiftieth anniversary of his receiving his Master of Arts degree in art from the university.

In anticipation of his visit to campus, Mr. Christenberry and I recently talked on the phone about a wide variety of subjects. He has a very relaxed style of speaking, as if he never left the dusty porches and kudzu jungles of west Alabama. His dry sense of humor and gentle spirit are sometimes difficult to convey in writing, but were ever-present in our conversation.

William Christenberry entered the University of Alabama as a freshman in 1954, intending to major in commercial art. "I didn't know any better," he laughs. But his teachers' observations of him, and his own instincts, steered him in another direction.

Christenberry said that Jack Granata, Howard Goodson, Melville Price, Lawrence Calcagno, a visiting artist from the west coast, and Frank Engle, from whom he only took one class, influenced him toward the fine arts. In Engle's class, he didn't make pots, but fashioned ceramic figures that he sees as connected to his later Klan pieces. Christenberry credits Joe Bolt, who taught him drawing his freshman year, with "predicting" he would be a painter, not a commercial artist.<sup>1</sup> Granata, Price, and Goodson he counted as friends, as well as influential teachers. "Mr. Granata was a wonderful teacher and a wonderful friend," he recalled. "I identified very closely with Howard Goodson because he was from Alabama, from a small town – Vernon, I think – and he was real special to me." He remembers Ted Klitzke, who came in as chair in 1958, as "solid as a rock and a true gentleman."

Christenberry recalls the atmosphere around the department

when he was in school from 1954 through 1959. "All the faculty were very active, doing their own studies. A lot of that excitement was coming out of New York, with Abstract Expressionism, which was a vital movement at that time."

During his school years, however, Christenberry began to find his own voice, and "to deal with subject matter, but in an expressionistic way," as he puts it. About his paintings, he said, "They've got all that gesture. I've always loved surface, texture, painting, thick paint. But, I wanted to use again the subject matter that I was familiar with, that I grew up with, that I cared so deeply about."



Christenberry in his D. C. studio in 2009. Photo by Bill Dooley.

When he was a boy, one Christmas Santa Claus gave him a Brownie camera, but it wasn't until he was in school at the university that he began using it. "I went into that landscape, in Tuscaloosa and Hale counties primarily, and began to photograph the things that caught my eye, the vernacular architecture in particular, the country graveyards, which were beautiful things. I used to haunt country graveyards...just to feed my spirit."

In *Working from Memory*, his most recent publication, he talks about how the Brownie camera – and the landscape of west Alabama – helped him move from pure Abstract Expressionism to his own painting dialect:

"Abstract Expressionism was all the rage in the art world then, and just like everybody else I was painting in that style. I was coming to grips with my feelings about the landscape and what was in it, though, so I incorporated objects or places into my paintings, such as graveyards and tenant houses. I would take color photos with the Brownie of anything that caught my eye, send them to the local drugstore to be developed and use the photos as color references for my paintings in the studio."<sup>2</sup>

He had already been photographing around west Alabama when another event steered Christenberry toward his unique painting vernacular. He discovered the book, *Let Us Now Praise Famous*



Men by James Agee and Walker Evans, which was reissued in 1960. “[It] made a tremendous impression on me.” It was actually Agee’s writing that had more of an impact on Christenberry than Evans’ photographs. “See, Agee was a fellow southerner, he was from Knoxville Tennessee, or born there. That was, and is still considered – this is not just my opinion – one of the best collaborations between a visual artist – Walker Evans, and a writer – Agee. What Agee was doing with the written word is what I wanted to do with paint. Not literally, but in terms of feeling.”

Christenberry recalled that one of the “wonderful” things about the department is that they brought in visiting artists from all over. “It didn’t get stale.” Lawrence Calcagno, an Abstract Expressionist painter from San Francisco (1913-1993) was one of those visiting artists. Christenberry describes Calcagno’s painting style as lyrical abstraction, which provided a counterbalance to Mel Price’s style of Abstract Expressionism. Price and Calcagno were also very different personalities, which Christenberry recalls helped him develop different sides of his own artistic self. “[Calcagno] was a very gentle-type man, very soft spoken, very bright. Mel was very brash, opinionated, and outspoken. But I loved them both.”

Melville Price, who came to Alabama from New York in 1958 and taught art until his death in 1970, had a lasting influence on Christenberry. “He could be gruff; he could express his opinion. He latched on to me and I latched on to him and we had some interesting tussles. He was very significant to me.”

*“I finally got up enough nerve to call up Fortune magazine where Evans worked. I probably made a fool of myself. But he was very, very kind...”*

Price helped put Christenberry in touch with the outside art world before and after he graduated. When he took a trip to New York as a student, Christenberry and his friend Peter Thomas (who later became Dean of the Corcoran School of Art, and then head of the Graphics Department of the Federal Reserve) took with them a letter of introduction from Mel Price

to his friend Franz Kline. They tried tracking Kline to his favorite bar in Greenwich Village, Cedar Tavern, where Kline and his artist friends hung out. Christenberry didn’t shrink from telling a story on himself about stalking the artist in the city. “I didn’t have any money. I nursed one beer. I was shaking in my boots. The bartender just let me sip it; I’m not a big drinker, anyway. Finally he said, ‘you’re just ‘bout out of luck, son. Franz comes in here every night and he hasn’t been here one night since you came here.’”

Later they went to Kline’s studio, and opened the mail slot to slip in the letter of introduction. “I lifted that little flap and you could see these wonderful big black and white paintings all over the place.”

Christenberry accepted an instructorship in the department

when he graduated and stayed about a year – and might have stayed longer. “Mel was very supportive of my painting, and as time went on, he said to me, ‘you know you should move on and see something of the rest of the world – don’t get stuck here.’ That was not a criticism of the university, but pushing a young person out into the world.”

Christenberry took Price’s advice and moved to New

York. Artistically it was not the most productive year for him, but in the big city he found influences, made decisions, and met people that would figure significantly in his artistic life to come.

The other artist he tracked down in New York was Walker Evans. “I finally got up enough nerve to call up *Fortune* magazine where Evans worked. I probably made a fool of myself.



Christenberry in his D. C. studio in 2009. Photo by Bill Dooley.

But he was very, very kind and gentle, and when I finished my off-the-wall diatribe, he wanted to know what did I do, why was I in New York?” Evans listened to Christenberry and then asked to see his snapshots. The young artist hesitated to show them because he had made them for himself, for reference purposes only. But Evans insisted on seeing them. “I was as nervous as all



## GRIMES - continued from page 2

The Alabama Civil Justice Foundation, the Alabama Humanities Foundation, and the Southern Poverty Law Center are just some of APAEP's supporters. Funds from the purchase of an Alabama Arts Car Tag also contribute money to this program.

When Grimes talks about his students at Donaldson Maximum Security Prison, it is clear he feels he is filling a real need. "These students have powerful things to say. A lot of them won't get out anytime soon. This is it for a lot of them. The world has forgotten them. This drawing class is a chance for them to have a voice. It's tricky to get them to open up. A lot of them are self-taught; several have good facility in drawing." He sees his role as helping them refine their drawing skills and helping them "open up the possibilities" for creating something more. "It's a mix between how much I teach [draftsmanship], and how much I get them to express and get something more [from their art] they didn't expect."

Grimes is learning at least as much from his students as they are from him. "They come up with amazingly deep material. There is rawness on occasion. It's inspiring for me - and helpful. In a college environment, it's easy to get fed up with a few students who are less invested than their parents with their education, to get on the cynical side." Grimes says it's refreshing to be around students "who do their homework, who have high expectations for themselves. If I come to class [at Donaldson] and I'm not prepared, I feel like a jerk."

Some of his UA art students assume the prisoners he teaches are not good students. "[I tell my UA students,] 'my prison students are whooping your asses; they are always working and thinking about [their art].'"

Stevens concurs and adds that the prison classes are "more like a graduate-level class in behavior and work ethic." Speaking from her years of experience and of observing other teachers, Stevens says, "You will never be the same after you teach in the prisons – and that's a good thing...[You are] teaching for the sake of teaching. The artist gets to teach what he or she wants to teach – to do something because you love it."

Grimes hasn't decided if he will teach a course in the fall, but he's thinking about it. Speaking of the personal rewards, he smiles, "It's kind of addictive."

For more information about the program, go to: <http://media.cla.auburn.edu/apaep/>

## CHRISTENBERRY - continued from page 5

get-out. He went through them one by one." Finally Evans told him, "'Young man, that little camera has become a perfect extension of your eye, and I suggest you take these seriously.'" Evans and Christenberry eventually became friends, and traveled to Hale County together in 1973.

Christenberry's life's work is not only the art pieces he imbues, in all their rich forms of painting, sculpture, assemblages, and photography, with the essence of the Black Belt landscape. It is also the embedding of that landscape into his and his family's psyche. He and his family have rarely missed a year of their annual return to west Alabama, to visit his parents' families and the land where they lived, for the same reasons he visits country graveyards: "just to renew my spirit." "I didn't know that earth, that red dirt – what an effect it would have on me."

"The time spent with grandparents on both sides was very, very important in my life...I have nothing but fond memories of that – grandfathers and grandmothers would tell stories, wonderful stories. Most Southerners are pretty darn good storytellers. I didn't realize at the time what an impression that tradition would have on me later. 'Cause I like a good story. I like to think that once in a while I can tell a good story."



<sup>1</sup> J. Richard Gruber, *William Christenberry — The Early Years, 1954-1968* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 15.

<sup>2</sup> *William Christenberry: Working from Memory — Collected Stories*, S. Lange, ed. (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2008), 14.



## SCHEDULE OF EXHIBITIONS FALL 2009

### **Dozier Bell: Navigator**

31 July - 4 September

Maine artist Dozier Bell's tiny charcoal drawings on Mylar and large paintings on canvas intrigue observers with images of city, sky, and sea, framing conflict and daring. Impressions of her work include "original... having an unsettling, stunning presence" and "the quiet of something taking your breath away." Bell has received numerous fellowships and awards and is one of twelve recipients of the 2009 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation Individual Support Grants. Bell will lecture on her art work Wednesday, August 26, at 5:00 pm in 205 Gorgas Library, with a reception following in the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art.



Above: Dozier Bell, *Jump*, 2009, charcoal on Mylar, 3.25 x 4", courtesy of the artist.

### **The Rural Studio: Rose Lee's House**



24 September - 29 October 2009

Auburn University's Rural Studio designed and built a new home for Rose Lee in Footwash, Alabama. The exhibition, which focuses on Lee's home, will

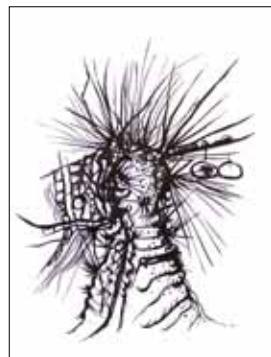
feature design and installation by the Rural Studio especially for the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art and Garland Hall. Faculty member Elena Barthel directed the design and production of Rose Lee's house and worked with students to design the gallery's exhibition. Barthel will present a lecture on Tuesday, September 29, at 5:00 pm in 205 Gorgas Library, with a reception following in the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art.

Above: Rural Studio students on roof of Rose Lee's house, courtesy of Rural Studio.

### **William Christenberry: Land/Memory**

5 November - 22 December 2009

The art work of native Tuscaloosan and UA art department graduate William Christenberry will be featured in a homecoming exhibition. His native Alabama has never been very far away as



William Christenberry, *Southern Tree XLVII*, February 2, 2002, ink drawing, collection of the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art.

the subject matter of his art work for this professor emeritus of the Corcoran School of Art. Christenberry will present a lecture Thursday, November 5, at 5:00 pm in 205 Gorgas Library, with a reception following in the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art.

### SARAH MOODY GALLERY OF ART ON THE WEB

<http://art.ua.edu/>

Facebook Fan Page

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Tuscaloosa-AL/Sarah-Moody-Gallery-of-Art/20856433609?ref=ts>

### VISITOR PARKING ON CAMPUS

A parking deck at the corner of Hackberry and Campus Drive provides visitor parking at a nominal cost, and is only a five minute walk to Garland Hall. To reach Garland, exit the main doors of the deck and cross Hackberry south to Margaret Drive. Follow Margaret Drive along the side of Smith Hall until you reach Capstone Drive, the main street which runs between Gorgas Library and Garland Hall. Follow Capstone to Garland Hall and the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art.

For more info call  
the gallery:  
(205) 348-1890.



Photo by Bill Dooley.



### **Full Moon Emerging for Artists**

NORTHPORT, Ala. - The Kentuck Museum Association is now accepting proposals for the Full Moon Emerging Artist Program. Only regional applicants, living in a 300-mile radius of Northport/Tuscaloosa, are eligible. GTAs and part-time instructors may apply as long as they are not making a living selling their work. For more details on application requirements and proposal forms go to [www.kentuck.org](http://www.kentuck.org) or call (205) 758-1257.

Department of Art and Art History, Box 870270, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0270.  
Alumni: Send us your news, memories, and ideas! Attention: The Loupe, The University of Alabama

The University of Alabama  
Department of Art and Art History  
Box 870270  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0270  
<http://art.ua.edu>

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- 
- Al Sella wins awards
  - Interviews with faculty Jamey Grimes and alumnus William Christenberry
  - Sarah Moody Gallery Fall Exhibitions
    - Student news
    - Alumni news
  - A timeline of department history
- ...and much more!*

Our new website will be up soon  
with the same URL:

<http://art.ua.edu/>

## *Calendar of Events*

July 31 *Navigator: Paintings by Dozier Bell* opens in the Sarah Moody Gallery.

August 13-14 Faculty-Staff Retreat at the University Club.

August 17 New faculty orientation.

August 19 Classes begin.

August 26 5:00 pm lecture by Dozier Bell, Gorgas 205. Opening reception for *Navigator: Paintings by Dozier Bell* immediately following in the Sarah Moody Gallery.

September 24 6:00 pm *Rose Lee's House* opening reception, Sarah Moody Gallery.

September 29 5:00 pm lecture by Elena Barthel: *Rose Lee's House*, Gorgas 205.

October 27 ARTstor Training.

November 5 5:00 pm lecture by William Christenberry, Gorgas 205. Opening reception immediately following in the Sarah Moody Gallery.