

# Far from city lights



Each artist in the Swainsboro collective, which devotes itself to community projects in Georgia, has a distinct style. Above: "Freedom Before Fortune," mixed media by Anthony Faris. Below: "Soldier," black-and-white photography by Bryan Ghiloni.

By JERRY CULLUM  
For the Journal-Constitution

You can go home again. And, as an artist, you can make home a different place.

That is the concept behind Stillmoreeroots, a collaborative of seven young, professionally trained artists living in or near Swainsboro. The group takes its name from Stillmore, the town where they present an annual "Art in the Woods" exhibition. The members have reunited from Oregon, New York and elsewhere to devote themselves to community-oriented art projects in conjunction with the Georgia Rural Economic Development Center.

Despite their collective status, their works remain distinctly individual. Bridget Conn turns leaves, insects and old letters into exquisite combinations that evoke nostalgia. Seen in a city setting, Conn's work reminds us that beauty can be wrought from unusual materials. In the place where the work is made, it suggests that



the overlooked ordinary stuff of local life is worth something.

Anthony Faris, who also uses local materials, asserts the virtue of rural communities more explicitly. The works include loose quotations of the American flag. In one, woven strips like those found in caneback chairs replace the field of stars, and a whisk broom is attached to the area suggesting the flag's stripes. Titled "Freedom Before Fortune," the piece celebrates

## REVIEW

### "Stillmoreeroots: Where Main Streets Meet"

Through May 27. Noon-5 p.m. Thursday-Saturday. Ty Stokes Gallery, 261 Walker St. S.W. 404-222-9863. \$650-\$2,200. [www.tystokes.com](http://www.tystokes.com)

**Verdict:** Excellent collectivity and a must-see.

the community in which Faris lives. So does "Prayers for the Powerless," a piece of found wood that includes an open lock and its key.

Desmal Purcell, whose grandparents still live in Stillmore, pushes symbolism in more obscure directions in color photographs depicting the same work of art placed in various forest settings. The photograph is framed in an opened crate with a smaller, locked crate suspended below it. In other exhibitions, the small crate is opened and the large crate is locked shut.

This sort of art is seldom seen in smaller locales, other than on college campuses. Even the representational painting of Jean Gray Drake's portraits of the other artists pushes the edge a little. Nick Nelson's collage of starry constellations is a type of mysterious visual poetry that may stretch the horizons of many viewers.

In this context, Brian Ghiloni's black-and-white photographs of the faces of sleepers on the New York subway provide familiarity. "Floor Boards," Ghiloni's poetic study of light and shadow on old wood, suggests the ways he may respond to his current environment.

The show holds up brilliantly in the environs of Castleberry. It's only part of the work these young idealists are taking into what the granting agencies call "under-served communities." The agencies call this "out-reach," but for these artists, it's just acting in the places they already live.