Spring 2009

Under the Dome - Spring 2009

McKissick Museum--University of South Carolina

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Much has been said about tradition. The modern poet T.S. Eliot wrote, “A tradition without intelligence is not worth having.” Exploring the links between intelligence, the acquisition of knowledge, and the use of reason and tradition—the handing down of customs from one generation to the next—is central to the mission of the University of South Carolina’s McKissick Museum.

Beginning in February, McKissick will present some of the tangible and intangible traditions that spring from the rich multigenerational knowledge of our communities. Like other regions of the United States, a number of our traditions are intrinsic to Southern culture. They are both enduring and evolving. Some are like sedimentary rock, with each generation adding something to the one before, while others are fluid like a river. But they are all “worth keeping.”

Here at McKissick we use another type of intelligence, our curatorial knowledge, to learn from, perpetuate, and share these traditions. We collect, conserve, preserve, and research handmade objects such as quilts, baskets, and pottery. We also document other art forms such as music, cooking, and storytelling. The exhibition Worth Keeping! Traditions from the Permanent Collection, will offer visitors an opportunity to sample some of the best examples of Southern folklife from the museum’s holdings and consider the community values that have informed their creation.

The exhibition will explore such topics as the role of families in the passing of knowledge from parent to child and the importance of family stories and oral traditions in understanding the history and meaning of everyday objects. It will also look at the influence of modern life and technology on changing traditions. While some artists have perpetuated older forms, others have branched off in different artistic traditions.

Worth Keeping! Traditions from the Permanent Collection will be on display from Feb. 14 to Aug. 1, 2009, in McKissick Museum’s north gallery.
The Life and Times of Congressman Robert Smalls

From his commandeering of a Confederate transport ship during the Civil War to winning a seat in the United States Congress, the life of Robert Smalls is one of legendary proportions. Smalls, an S.C. slave and ship’s pilot, freed himself, his family, and several other African Americans in 1862 when he guided the ship *Planter* out of Charleston harbor and surrendered to the Union blockade.

The Life and Times of Congressman Robert Smalls explores the legacy of this heroic figure. After his daring escape, he became famous throughout the North. His act secured him positions with the U.S. Army and Navy. He met with President Lincoln in 1862 and successfully persuaded him to allow black men to enlist in the U.S. Army.

Smalls’ accomplishments continued following the war. He returned to Beaufort, S.C., opened a business, and ran for public office, establishing the party of Lincoln in the state. He served as a member of the S.C. House (1865–1870) and in the S.C. Senate (1871–1874). He was then elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. During his political career he authored legislation that created the first public school system in America.

The Life and Times of Congressman Robert Smalls will be on display from Feb. 7 to April 4, 2009, in McKissick’s north gallery.

Order Now! Decorating the Modern Home

The concept of decorating a home in the 21st century has expanded into an unprecedented profit-generating enterprise. From the celebrity of Martha Stewart to the proliferation of catalogs, Web sites, and cable television channels, Americans have become obsessed with adorning our interior environments. Through a survey of utilitarian and decorative household objects originally made available by catalog, Order Now! Decorating the Modern Home will explore the types of fine arts and crafts consumers purchase as a means of defining personal taste and projecting societal status.

The first mail-order catalogs offered products made from new technologies to aid our nation’s developing industries. By the late 19th century, manufacturers expanded their offerings of mass-produced items to meet the needs at home. Sears and Roebuck, as well as Montgomery Ward, were the first nationwide distributors to offer a variety of goods from dishes, textiles, and furniture to decorative glass and porcelain doorknobs. With the continued westward population expansion, the time was right for mail-order merchandise, and the rest is history.

Order Now! Decorating the Modern Home will be on display from May 23 to Aug. 15, 2009, in McKissick’s south gallery.

Key Ingredients at the South Carolina State Fair...

As Key Ingredients: America by Food continues to travel the state, the exhibit enjoyed a two-week run at the South Carolina State Fair in October. More than 425,000 people attended the fair, exposing the exhibit to a large and diverse audience. Several thousand Key Ingredients companion booklets were distributed, and Folk Heritage Award recipient Will Goins presented programs on Native American cooking traditions, including venison chili, rabbit stew, and flat bread.

The exhibit has been enthusiastically received, with both the Elloree Heritage Museum and the Belton Area Museum Association reporting increased visitorship and engaging community-based programming.

Key Ingredients is currently at the Edgefield County Peach Museum and will finish at the Edisto Island Museum in May. Take a moment to visit www.keyingredients.org to learn more about the exhibit and the host sites. McKissick Museum is proud to support Key Ingredients, a collaboration between the Humanities Council and the Smithsonian Institution’s Traveling Exhibition Services.
Wonderful Curiosity

Curious about art and the wonders it can inspire? Join University of South Carolina first lady Ms. Patricia Moore-Pastides and the McKissick Museum Advisory Council for the 15th annual spring gala, *Spring for Art: Wonder and Curiosity*. This year's gala will be held on Friday, March 27, 2009, at McKissick Museum on the University’s historic Horseshoe. It provides an excellent opportunity to support museum programs.

Spring for Art features more than 50 artists with strong S.C. ties. Works are available for sale, with a portion of proceeds benefiting McKissick Museum. The event provides a unique opportunity to interact with the artists and form a connection between the person and their works. Participating artists include Mary Gilkerson, David Russell, Virginia Scotchie, and Laura Spong.

Tickets for the gala are $55 per person and $100 per couple. For tickets or sponsorships, please call 803-777-7251 or e-mail Ja-Nae Epps at jmepps0@mailbox.sc.edu.

In Memory of a Noted Sweetgrass Basketmaker

A native of Mt. Pleasant, S.C., Harriet Baillem Brown was no stranger to sweetgrass baskets. The eighth generation in her family to make baskets, she worked to share the tradition with family and friends. Brown made baskets for more than 55 years, learning the process from great grandparents, grandparents, aunts, and her mother. Her mother took Brown's first basket to the market in Charleston and sold it for 25 cents. That quarter gave her the encouragement to keep weaving.

A gifted teacher, Brown was featured in local history classes and traveled the region to participate in festivals and workshops. She felt that sharing the process was one way to give back to the community.

Brown passed away on Sept. 26, 2008. A friend of McKissick Museum, she will be missed by all who appreciated her wit, energy, and smile. Brown received the Jean Laney Harris Folk Heritage Award in 2003. One of her granddaughters, Lynne Johnson, is continuing the family tradition, making baskets in the same basket stand along Highway 17 in Mt. Pleasant.

A Learning Laboratory

McKissick began a faculty curatorial initiative last fall to enhance the museum’s role as a learning laboratory. University classes are encouraged to visit the museum, and faculty members who teach subjects related to current exhibits are encouraged to incorporate a tour into their syllabus. Curators also work with professors to develop specific class projects using McKissick’s collections. For example, during the fall semester, students from Dr. Allison Marsh’s graduate seminar on material culture were assigned mystery objects to research. The assignment taught students how to develop good research skills and provided the museum with better documentation of its collections. Currently, students in an American decorative arts class are researching three-dimensional objects from the collection and reporting their findings as Wikipedia articles. The information generated will also be used as metadata in collections’ records and as part of an online image database. Faculty and students may also submit proposals to present their research in an exhibition at the museum.

Museum management student Melanie Neil and Dr. Jodi Barnes of the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology have collaborated for the first presentation. Neil created an exhibition of archaeological finds that tell the story of the lifeways of freedmen on James Island, S.C. The display on view from Feb. 14 to June 27, 2009, is one component of a larger conference on the archaeology of the recent African-American past. The faculty curatorial initiative continues to evolve, and University faculty members are encouraged to participate. If you are interested in research-based learning using primary resources, please contact Lana Burgess at 803-777-5486.
The McKissick Museum is located at the head of the University of South Carolina’s historic Horseshoe in the heart of campus. All exhibitions are free and open to the public.

Gallery hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The museum is open from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays. McKissick is closed on Sundays. Metered parking is available on all adjacent streets and in the lower level of Pendleton Street Garage.

A number of volunteer opportunities are available at the McKissick Museum. Call 803-777-7251 for information on membership, tours, programs, and exhibits. Visit us on the Internet at www.cas.sc.edu/mcks.

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