

Du Quoin Pinckneyville WEEKLY-PRESS

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The Weekly-Press is the successor newspaper of the Du Quoin Weekly and Pinckneyville Press.

Happenings
Inside This Issue

Pinckneyville's Illinois Rural Heritage Museum to Exhibit Work from Convergent Media Artist Brian Wilkes



A regal man thinking rural thoughts, Brian Wilkes holds court in front of his “Country Values” series.

By Nate Fisher, *Weekly-Press*

The musculature of a horse ripples between sun and shadow. A lone arm reaches up from the corn to a cooler and frittering sky. A dogwood explodes into blossom. These area points of contact for artist Brian Wilkes. The conversation at hand? “Country Values: A Celebration of Rural America,” a series of testimonies to a set of values Wilkes calls “self-evident.”

Wilkes’ exploration of “Country Values” will be on exhibit at the Rural Heritage Museum from August 18-21, Thursday-Saturday 8-5, Sunday 1-5. The artist would like to invite the public to a “vernissage”, or preview of the show, on Wednesday, August 17, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the museum. Additionally, there’s an artist’s

reception on Saturday, August 20, at 1 p.m., where the public can meet the artist and ask questions.

Wilkes' work is both cerebral and highly accessible. His training is classical, his inspirations across the board, and these elements converge with digital influences and machine assistance to showcase the subjects and landscapes of rural America in a multi-layered experience open to all who have at least considered a dream at one point in time.

"Country Values" are self-evident in Wilkes' work because Wilkes is an attuned listener of what surrounds him. His is a stenographer of the bleach-white sun on fruit skin, the wind through crops, the colors of rust, and figures warped by humidity passing on dirt pathways. All the pieces in his "Country Values" series straddle a textural threshold resulting from the sensitive act of "convergent media art."

Convergent media art, Wilkes' principal style, combines methods such as drawing, painting, photography, printmaking, silkscreen, and lithograph with digital manipulation. A print is produced with the high quality inkjet pigment process giclée and may undergo further acrylic application. "It's using all manners, disciplines, and technologies from the last 200 years that converge into a finished, multi-layered piece, which is very difficult to do any other way," Wilkes explains. "You'll see a considerable digital influence in my work and also crossing somewhat into artificial intelligence.

The "Country Values" series is inspired "to some degree" by a series of 1943 Norman Rockwell paintings titled "The Four Freedoms." Rockwell's four "Freedoms" were the freedoms of speech and worship and the freedoms from want and fear. Wilkes invokes similar themes through his focus on ordinary people, objects, and scenes full of dust from which all things must come and return. He also considers the artist Edward Hopper a potent influence. Hopper painted America in the mid-20th century as a scarred lonely place, where the speed of life under industrialization had eroded all its traditions and human connections. When you consider Wilkes' artistic intention and method, and audience can understand how these two thematic currents converge.

"I try to promote conservative American values without getting partisan," Wilkes says. He jokes, I like to say I'm kind of like Thomas Kinkadee without the corn syrup and pandering hypocrisy. Things don't look like hobbit dollhouses."

His artistic mission is one of calculated simplicity, much in line with the values of our small country within a larger one: “I’m trying to do things that celebrate rural America, and just kind of remind people Here’s where your food comes from,” Wilkes says, “Here’s where a lot of our values come from, even though increasingly fewer and fewer of us actually live on a farm anymore.”

Wilkes’ investigation of rural sensibility stems from his family’s relationship with the land. “Both of my grandfathers were farm boys who had to find other livelihoods because the farm couldn’t support that many people anymore. So it’s very recent in my family history,” Wilkes explains, “A lot of it has to do with trying to understand the lives of my ancestors.”

Wilkes writes on his website that this understanding is “an examination of my own ancestral links to the noble families of three continents (most of his collectors are titled nobility) and spiritual kinship with the animal, plant, and mineral kingdoms as perceived through my Native American ancestry and training.” He is a self-described “descendant of farmers and ranchers, as well as kings and emperors” that “celebrates both the strength of humble country values and the romance of chivalry and castles.” Wilkes is also an author of various titles celebrating indigenous culture, medicine, and language. Notable among his other pursuits is his role as a translator in the Cherokee Bible Project, which seeks to update and create new translations of the Old and New testaments in Cherokee. His overall work to educate the public and preserve the Cherokee language and culture has been celebrated. In 2015, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from the Wolsey Hall Theological School in Oxford, England, for his preservation efforts.

Visitors to brianwilkes.art can learn more about his work and browse his catalog. A larger selection of his prints can be viewed at www.saatchiart.com/brianwilkes . He also takes commissioned work and wants to invite the public to contact him via his website or a Facebook look-up if they’re interested. The “Country Values” series will be featured at the Illinois Rural Heritage Museum from August 18-21, Thursday-Saturday 8-5, Sunday 1-5.



“Cooperative Work”, 2022, Convergent Media/Acrylic on canvas.



“Anigeyv”, 2022, Convergent Media/ Acrylic on canvas.