

Artist Caroline Youngblood uses family keepsakes as her inspiration

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Caroline Youngblood has a box filled with treasured keepsakes left behind by her grandparents.

Upholstery from furniture, miscellaneous clothing and worn recipe cards spill out of the tattered box. These items eventually find their way to canvas as Youngblood integrates her past into the non-objective and abstract paintings and drawings that line the walls of her home and the local businesses that sell them.

Youngblood grew up surrounded by cotton fields on Breston Plantation, located in Riverton in Caldwell Parish. Her childhood home was built in the 1790s, and her relatives have lived there ever since. With such a rich heritage, it seems almost natural that Youngblood would incorporate her background into her artwork, but that hasn't always been the case.

Youngblood grew up drawing and playing instruments, but her rural public school didn't offer art classes. It was only after she left the banks of the Ouachita River where she grew up to attend college at Louisiana State University that she found her true calling. She went to college with plans to study French, but it took only one art class to change her mind. After graduating from LSU, Youngblood moved across the country to Syracuse, N.Y., to continue her education. It was while she was away from the humid Louisiana summers and swarms of mosquitoes that she began using family keepsakes in her art.

"I was very homesick in New York," Youngblood said. "When I got there, I realized all I wanted to do was paint things about home. Those were the only things I was really drawn to at the time. My dad Fed-Exed me stuff all the time."

These days Youngblood, 29, lives in Monroe and is pursuing a master's degree at Louisiana Tech University. When she isn't working on her thesis or working at her part-time job, she sifts through the memories left behind by her deceased grandparents, Uriah Millsap Youngblood and Carrie Josephine Hill Youngblood.

"Things that have a lot of family history, that is what I make my collages with," Youngblood said. "My grandmother left behind recipes, letters, clothes; she never liked to throw anything away. She grew up during the Depression and World War II. It wasn't that she didn't have money that is just how she was raised. She saved and made use of everything."

Youngblood's beloved grandmother died in a train accident in 1998 while driving Youngblood and her younger brother to school. The accident seriously injured Youngblood and also injured her younger brother.

"Because she died two weeks before I turned 18, she wasn't able to pass on a lot of traditions," Youngblood said. "These things are all I have left. That is why I use things like letters and recipes in my art. I never got to hear the stories behind them."

Youngblood finds beauty in the smallest of things. One of her latest paintings features notes written on a calendar by her grandmother in 1985. Youngblood took a Christmas list, shopping list and guest list, along with other items like faded wallpaper from Breston Plantation and layered it on a canvas using glue.

Once the collage is the way she visualized it, Youngblood said she will choose an image to paint on top of the collage from a pile of Kodachrome transparency slides she has been collecting for years from junk shops and garage sales throughout the state.

Images of mothers pushing children in strollers, family gatherings, and bayou scenes are her favorites.

"I love to think about who these people are," Youngblood said of the people smiling happily at the camera in the images. "Are they still alive? Exactly who was this woman? It is interesting to think about."

Youngblood's finished products can be found hanging at Lu San', Arlette Salon, Starbucks on Forsythe Avenue and Topsy's in Sterlington. Recent art shows have netted Youngblood several commissions, and she hopes to one day build a strong client base and be able to survive on doing what she loves while preserving artifacts from her past.

"I really just want to sell my paintings, that would make me so happy," Youngblood said. "I taught college in Syracuse and high school for a little while. When the stress gets to be too much, sometimes the money isn't worth it. I would

rather spend my time doing what I love. I feel like God gave me this gift and it is my responsibility to live up to his expectations."

More information

To view Caroline Youngblood's artwork, visit www.carolineyoungblood.com, or call her at 225-936-1814.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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