

‘On a journey’: Artist follows imagination with recycled maps

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One rainy evening, artist Lanny Brewster was reclining on his front porch when a car came barreling up his driveway. It drove over his front lawn and slowed down as it approached the woods that border his home on the Miccosukee Land Co-op. Brewster says the scene was straight out of a cartoon.

“Many people learn about maps, but many don’t learn how to read maps or have a sense of direction,” says Brewster, who said the driver had been relying on their GPS system to direct them rather than a map. He eventually helped the lost travelers and sent them on their way.

Maps have provided Brewster with an endless supply of inspiration when creating his mixed media collages. Brewster stitches together bits and pieces from various antique and recycled maps to create unique new topographies.

Highways sprawl like veins across the landscape in his “A to B: You Can’t Get There From Here,” which is an Honorable Mention winner in this year’s Creative Tallahassee exhibition at the City Hall Art Gallery.

The annual juried show features more than 50 paintings, drawings, photographs, textiles, and sculptures and will be on display through June 27.



Artist Lanny Brewster works on a project. His “A to B: You Can’t Get There From Here” is an Honorable Mention winner in this year’s Creative Tallahassee exhibition at the City Hall Art Gallery. LANNY BREWSTER

Finding stories in ‘drawer residue’

Brewster’s maps have been shown in past Creative Tallahassee exhibits, as

well as in private and institutional collections across the southeast. As a painter, he was the Artist-in-Residence for the National Estuarine Reserve on

If you go

What: Creative Tallahassee 2022

When: 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday to Friday through June 27

Where: 300 South Adams St

Cost: Free and open to the public

Contact: For more information, call 850-224-2500 or visit tallahasseearts.org. All the submitted works can be viewed on COCA’s Online Gallery at cocaonlinegallery.zenfolio.com.

historic Sapelo Island, Georgia, and shared his coastal landscapes at the Southeast Georgia Medical Center, Historic Ritz Theater, Gadsden Arts Center, and the FSU Museum of Fine Arts.

Growing up in south Georgia, Brewster always dreamed of being an archaeologist or architect. He would sketch floor plans in his youth and studied drafting in high school. Brewster put these skills to work constructing sets and designing props for theatrical productions.

A self-described hoarder, Brewster decided to take a step back from painting once he saw the shadowbox work of visual artist and filmmaker, Joseph Cornell and the handmade collage stories of

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artist Aldwyth.

“That fit in with my aesthetics because I like to rescue things from going in the landfill,” says Brewster. “I find stories in even the smallest bits of paper. I call them drawer residue. It’s the things that are in the bottom of the drawer that no one thinks are worth anything, yet it might be a shopping list from the middle of the Great Depression or something that has a story to it.”

Building a world from scraps

Brewster began telling all kinds of stories with his map constructions. Sometimes he will find humorous place names in the back of atlases, like “Devil’s Heaven,” and tuck them away like Easter eggs inside his work.

More recently, he’s tackling stories of how humans are impacting the planet and creating maps that illustrate climate change, erosion, and the never-ending sprawl of highways that cut across the land.

While he doesn’t know where he will begin with any given work, his process

always starts with cutting out bits and scraps from various maps that he’s either found or been gifted over the years. He enjoys Arkansas maps in particular for their strong colors and illustrations. These maps also include close-ups of different highway interchanges which he finds helpful when looking for specific colors or lines.

“I choose maps like I would choose paint,” says Brewster. “I choose the pieces I’m using for their color and texture and other qualities about them. I’ve made some pieces where I wanted a green highway, so I have to go back through the bins of maps that I have and find them. I may sit for an afternoon and all I do is cut out the little three seconds of an inch of green highways.”

A journey for the eyes

With tweezers in hand, Brewster will begin placing these minute scraps together. Aside from some glue to hold each bit of highway in place, he relies solely on his imagination when putting them in place.

Each map is comprised of several layers and he weaves highways, lakes, rivers, and other topographical features on top of one another to create entirely new journeys for the eyes to travel along.

At the end, Brewster uses a UV protective coating so that this ephemera won’t fade or fall apart too soon. Brewster self-frames all his works and carries his collages on to old frames so that there is no distinction between where the map ends and the frame begins.

In addition to the maps that he has exhibited, Brewster has also completed custom maps for friends and family. He enjoys finding counties and cities that relate to a person’s name, or if it’s for a birthday present, he selects highways whose numbers reflect their age or birthday year or date.

Sifting through so many unique

maps and their locations, Brewster’s own travel wish list continues to grow. He hopes those who experience his maps in person will feel similarly motivated.

“I want to go everywhere,” says Brewster. “I like to keep the beauty of what I’m doing and make these maps pretty because they do lead you on some sort of journey. They led me on a journey while I made them.”

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).



Lanny Brewster's tools for creating his map art. LANNY BREWSTER



*Poulenc Trio
Sunday, May 8
Opperman Hall
4:00 p.m.*

*Also available as
livestream or video.
Tickets: 850-445-1616
www.theartistseries.org*