

is a result of both Jo and I having renewed our efforts in the studio after a period of inactivity due to a variety of things — moving, raising children, family affairs, and getting adjusted to a new job...Jo and I have tried to return to painting, to make it an integral part of our lives as it once was."

The two artists met in 1980 at East Carolina University. Their shared interest in art "allowed us to establish a kind of common ground," Byers says. "It's always been a plus for us."

"No, I wouldn't say we're competitive; we're blunt-spoken about what we do. I think we're honest with each other when we're offering criticism about each other's work. I don't think either of us feels threatened... we're both just interested in working on our respective directions."

Finding time to paint — in addition to teaching photography, drawing, two-dimensional design and painting, as well as advising the college yearbook — requires his best. They manage it by their own form of tag-team parenting that allows them time for their art.

"It's a real juggling act for both of us," Byers says. "We trade off childcare responsibilities." He takes the two little girls while Jo goes to the studio at home in the afternoons, and after dinner, Byers paints at his studio in Coltrane while Jo takes the children.

In his studio at night, Byers closes the door and turns up the light jazz after explaining politely to curious students who want to watch that he needs privacy to paint.

"In an art department, it's vitally important for students to see that their instructors are working, producing artists," he says.

In the March exhibit at Coltrane Art Center, students will see that. And they will see something else too: a showing of drawings, photographs and paintings by two artists dedicated to each other and their work.

by Joek Lauterer

"You can't separate art from life..."

--Jo Pumphrey

student days," Byers pauses to reflect. "But this year things seem more forward-looking. This is a people-oriented college, and I'm happy to be a part of that. In terms of my job it's pretty gratifying to be giving it back to the College through the students."

And now, after two years of settling in, the art instructor has opened a unique two-person show with Jo Pumphrey, who teaches part-time at BC.

The March exhibit in Coltrane Art Center is unusual because Byers and Pumphrey aren't just two artists; they're also husband and wife, and in many ways they are an artistic team, though their work is very different.

"I think Jo's paintings are more interpretive," says Byers. "Mine are interpretive, but deal more with physical facts. In some way the show represents new directions for me."

Byers' large-scale woodland scenes are "investigations of shape, light and texture." The forest has always been an inspiration for Byers, so his latest works are "admittedly autobiographical...I was raised on the sound, in a heavily wooded area and I always enjoyed the sights, sounds and smells of being in the woods. I would like to be reassured I guess that these places would still be there. And in that sense, the Pisgah Forest presents a wonderful resource for me."

"Jo and I have tried to return to painting, to make it an integral part of our lives as it once was..."

--Bill Byers

Florida state with a degree in Criminology and worked in that field until 1978. She worked for a flood relief counseling team to help Florida flood victims rebuild. Pumphrey felt the need to help people. "I wanted to contribute something to society," she says. But criminology became frustrating for her when she realized how difficult it would be to make significant changes in the world around her.

"I burned-out; so many people were crying on my shoulder," she says. Pumphrey counseled victims every day who had lost everything they owned to the flood. For her own relief, she traveled for a year and decided what route to take with her life.

And so came the journey of essence and simplicity that led her from criminology to art in one fell swoop. To that Pumphrey says, "I think the seeds were there."

With art, Pumphrey says, she knew she could be "completely independent of anyone else." And her basic desire to help people could still be fulfilled because "people come your way all the time," she says.

This is what lured her into teaching. "Teaching and art mutually support each other," she says. Pumphrey feels the stimulation of meeting other minds, which is synonymous with teaching, is important for her art. She feels it would be dangerous to do just her art because it would leave the opportunity to turn inward upon herself.

Pumphrey says if her students were not getting anything out of her teaching, then she wouldn't want to be involved. "I feel like I'm contributing with my teaching," she says.

Outside of her teaching she has other outlets to stimulate her art work. Music is the big one. Pumphrey plays the flute and loves jazz. She says playing her flute is like painting to a degree. There is a "basic foundation, structure, and discipline to all art forms," she says.

Because music is spacial and abstract, Pumphrey says, "It helps me make tangible things that are not rational." She feels the irrational elements to life are just as important, and although jazz "can be out there, ... and tests the limits to reality," art "test the boundaries that explain."

Pumphrey recalls that instant of knowing she should pursue an artistic career. She was sitting with a sketch pad and drawing one afternoon when her brother raced out to say good-bye. Five hours later he returned and she was still sitting there. She says she had not realized time had even passed. Pumphrey knew at that moment that she should investigate the art world.

She has investigated and pursued. She is now extremely active in her art, and she looks forward to becoming increasingly involved in her teaching and her painting.

For the far-off future, when the children are grown and she has retired from teaching, Pumphrey says, "That will be the time to walk in my studio and close the door."

by Biár Orrell

It frustrates Pumphrey that a lot of art is inaccessible to people who aren't familiar with the art world. "So in a way," she says, "using natural forms, I think, makes it more accessible and enjoyable."

A joint showing by two artistically skilled adults may provoke one to wonder if there's any underlying drive of competition. Pumphrey says it's hard to call it competition because that has such negative connotations.

"We challenge each other," she says, "... mostly we challenge ourselves." Pumphrey says she and Byers work closely together, relying upon each other as critics. "We stimulate each other in that thought process."

The competition they share is a constructive communication technique. Pumphrey says, "We are competitive on a side-by-side level."

Pumphrey met Byers at East Carolina University where she received her Master of Fine Arts, a terminal degree in studio art. "We met as we were passing," she says, smiling. Byers was leaving ECU as she was arriving.

The art duo met in 1980, married in '81, and had their first child, daughter Lillian, in '83 as Pumphrey was finishing graduate school. Lillian, now four, has since been joined by a brother, Will, who is one.

Pumphrey recalls doing her thesis work which consisted of a written paper and several paintings. "I had a new-born baby in the studio in a cardboard box."

As to everything happening so fast with school, marriage and children, Pumphrey feels the factors were right.

Pumphrey says, as an artist, she is intrigued with what others do, and even though she and Byers are opposites to each other in painting and drawing styles, they have been influenced by each other and have grown together artistically. "You can't separate art from life," she says.

And yes, her work has changed in the past eight years. In the Side-by-Side Byers/Pumphrey art show, Pumphrey has used oils for the first time because she has not had to worry about the fumes harming her children, and there has been no rush for the paintings to dry.

She has also done acrylic paintings and pencil drawings for this show. Pumphrey says her drawings help her discover new ideas for her paintings. "If something is potent enough, I'll use it for a painting," she says.

She compares the work in this show to her earlier work which was more chaotic, and dealt more with internal psychological states. She has now achieved the "edge" that she has been searching for.

photography by Biár Orrell