

# Mixed media, installation artist works in Newnan as artist in residence

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May. 08, 2016 - 8:32 AM



PHOTOS BY MAGGIE BOWERS



The Gray Cottage, Newnan's own residence remodeled specifically to house visiting talent, has been occupied this month by an artist with a unique view of the world around her and of her own inner workings.

Christine Cassano is a mixed media artist living and working, until very recently, in Phoenix, Arizona.

Cassano's latest works include three-dimensional pieces that explore the biology of the human body in conjunction with the science and technology commonly found in the environment.

'I work in all different materials,' Cassano explained. The artist gestured to a collection of small, curved pieces of kiln-fired porcelain strewn across both floor and table in the artist's studio of the Gray Cottage. 'Anything from concrete to porcelain - even metal.'

The historic bungalow, which is maintained by the local nonprofit, Newnan ArtRez, is located at 23 Clark Street, just beyond the McRitchie-Hollis Museum.

Cassano is the fifth artist-in-residence to visit Coweta, and the second to be brought to the ArtRez committee by the University of West Georgia. Unlike previous residents, Cassano has not been asked to offer demonstrations or art instruction, but has instead focused on the creation of a sculptural work commissioned by UWG for the lobby of the school's Newnan Campus. The artist revealed the completed piece Wednesday.

Cassano explained the commissioned work while in progress, in an interview conducted earlier in the week.

'My work is an exploration of both biology and technology - kind of fused together,' Cassano said.

In fact, the ceramic pieces being used resemble bone fragments. The pieces, which Cassano explained were shaped from wet clay wrapped around her own arms, were left unglazed, so as to retain the porcelain clay's original creamy white color.

Cassano noted that her thirst for knowledge of human biology, and subsequent sculptural expressions of that knowledge, all stemmed from a tragic accident she sustained at the age of 30.

'In my thirties I experienced a lot of health issues beginning with an accident that eventually led to a hip replacement at age 37,' Cassano said. 'So, I am bone and metal - I'm bionic.'

The artist also battles a chronic autoimmune disorder, which was likely brought on by the trauma of the accident. In an effort to understand the limitations of her own body, Cassano began to research her ailments, how they might be treated, and the amazing technology that was now part of her.

'The work is sort of autobiographical in that sense. It came from my studying and learning about all of these things that were happening to me,' Cassano said. 'But then it began to tie into a universal theme. We all sort of struggle with this technology in our lives and how that fuses in with our natural world - and so many of us are becoming sort of cyborgs - with joint replacements, hearing aids and so on.'

The exploration of science and technology is evident in Cassano's work, as is the representation of the inner-workings of the human body. The porcelain pieces used in the commissioned work for the university, as with several other similar recent works by the artist, are stamped with a motherboard from a modern computer.

A motherboard is the main circuit piece, essentially the computer's 'brain.' When pressed into damp clay, the result leaves an impression from the board that appears as a geometric pattern. 'It can also be an aerial view of a city,' Cassano said of the impression left from the board that appears in some ways organic, and in other ways, scientific.

The artist noted that with technology, as is with the human body, there is generally a center of control.

'Our cells are sort of formulated in the same way that data is formulated,' explained Cassano. 'A motherboard mimics the cells in regard to each of our cells are programmed with a set of functions, and the motherboard kind of does the same thing.'

This juxtaposition between flowing, natural shapes and the intricate detail found in technology is what the artist aims to explore.

'From a distance [my pieces] look like something you might see under a microscope, but when you get up close it is all industrial materials.'

Cassano experiments with the same concept of contrasting ideas even in her own life. The artist was born and raised in the southern part of Virginia, but after graduating college there with a degree in the arts, Cassano traveled to Arizona where the surrounding environment was somewhat opposite of what the artist had been accustomed to.

Newnan is, however, a welcomed change for the artist and a somewhat unexpected return to the south.

'I'm originally from Virginia, born and raised in the south, but I have been in Arizona for 15 years,' Cassano said. 'Phoenix is just harsh dessert, really hot. So, I've been out here for four weeks and the green is just so great.'

Cassano's last day in Newnan is today, but a piece of the artist will remain in the city as a permanent installation viewable in the lobby of the UWG Newnan campus.

In addition to the custom, commissioned work, the university has purchased a second piece created by Cassano.



Digital Diatoms was assembled by the artist in 2013. The mixed media panel is two feet in height by five feet in width and contains several similar elements found in many of Cassano's works. The piece will hang in the lobby of the Newnan campus, just down from Cassano's commissioned work.

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Article Published: May 08, 2016

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