

Submitted photos
Pat Potter, left,
and Jesse Akers



FINDING CONNECTIONS

Two Anniston artists collaborate on an exhibit about time and space, life and death

BY LISA DAVIS
Special to The Star

Curiouser and curiouser.
To understand the work of Anniston artists Pat Potter and Jesse Akers, it helps to think like Alice, the little girl who fell into Wonderland.
What's down that rabbit hole?
What's on the other side of that looking glass?
Can one really believe six impossible things before breakfast?

Pat, 84, and Jesse, 29, have been working together for the past seven years. The two have just opened a sprawling new exhibit at the Gadsden Museum of Art, which will be on display until Jan. 3.

Called "Patterns in Time: Becoming ... Being ... Disappearing," the show uses abstract imagery to explore deeply philosophical ideas about time, reality, life and death.

Pat believes there are three stages of life: becoming, being and disappearing.
"Past-present-future relates to becoming-being-disappearing," Jesse explained. "We're exploring cycles of how those interact and repeat. Order and disorder. Sense and nonsense."
"We study time and what it is," Pat said. "You can't have time without movement. Think about watching clouds. The movement is what's significant, not the form of the clouds. Our theory is that movement is the Mobius twist."

(Named for a 19th-century German mathematician, the Mobius twist is a mind-bending little thing, a single-sided surface with no boundaries. It's easy to make one. Take a strip of



"The Dust and Diamond Are One III"



"The Dust and Diamond Are One V"

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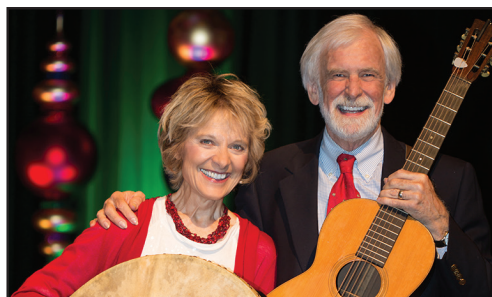
"The Dust and Diamond Are One I/VI"

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*A Turkey
Day timeline,
Page 10A*

ARTISTS
IN ACTION

*Two different
performances by Dolores
Hydock Dec. 3, Page 9A*



BRETT
BUCKNER

*This was going to be
a brilliant column,
but ..., Page 10A*



ART

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paper, give it a twist, then tape the ends together into a seamless whole. If you draw a line down the middle of the strip, you will end up marking both sides without ever lifting your pencil.)

"There's something spiritual about the movement," Pat said. "These things you experience occasionally that make it all fit together."

For example, the way Pat and Jesse met.

Pat was recovering from surgery and receiving physical therapy at home. Her nurse was Jesse's mom. "My mom has always had an appreciation for art," Jesse said. "The first thing she said upon entering Pat's house was, 'My son has to see this.'"

Visiting Pat's home/art studio is a bit like falling into a magical, fantastical place. Tucked into the side of a mountain, underneath a canopy of Alabama trees, the house itself is a work of art, filled with innumerable other works of art.

If you haven't already figured it out, Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" has always been one of Pat's favorite books.

"Begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end: then stop."
— The King of Hearts

Pat's background is in art and architecture. Her father, Richard Boinest, was an acrobat and architect whose works included LaGarde Apartments in Anniston and the International House at Jacksonville State University.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Pat worked at the Anniston Museum of Natural History. She has studied and exhibited around the world. She was a visiting professor of architecture at Iowa State and Auburn universities.

Jesse grew up in Anniston filling the pages of sketchbooks, but had no formal art training until he met Pat and became

IF YOU GO ...

WHAT: "Patterns of Time," an exhibit by Pat Potter and Jesse Akers
WHERE: Gadsden Museum of Art, 515 Broad St, Gadsden, 256-546-7365, gadsdenmuseum.com
WHEN: Through Jan. 3. Open Tuesdays-Fridays 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturdays 11 a.m.-3 p.m.
ADMISSION: Free

an intern in the collaborative studio of local artists she had formed.

Pat has long believed in collaboration. "As an older artist, this is the only way I could be working now," she said.

"We have similarities and we have differences," Jesse said. "A lot of our work is coming together on an idea, exploring it in our own ways, and coming back together. Collaboration adds new energy."

"And collaboration is what our world needs. It's not easy. Sometimes we scream at each other," she said with a laugh.

Pat had a stroke in June that temporarily paralyzed her left side, and she is just beginning to be able to walk again. But she and Jesse are already working on their next show, coming next spring to JSU. They hope to collaborate with students. It will be based on Leonardo da Vinci's iconic drawing of the Vitruvian Man — except theirs will be the Vitruvian Woman.

"This time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin."
— A description of the Cheshire Cat

The exhibit at the Gadsden Museum is dedicated to the memory of Pat's husband of 59 years, Guice Potter Jr., who died in 2018, and their son, Guice Potter III, who died in 2017.

After their passing, Pat found herself pondering the transformation from life to death. "The eye of the needle you go through is very thin," she said. "Life and death. Actual and virtual."

That led to a collaboration with Jesse

on a series of works called "The Dust and Diamond Are One."

"The idea of dust-to-diamond represents time," Pat explained. "Also, we discovered that the crystal structure of diamond is the same as human ash."

The mixed-media works are built up with such elements as leaves, shells, quartz crystals, paper, brass, steel, shards of glass, antique marbles, bones, wasp nests and clay. They are part of "Patterns in Time," and are displayed on the walls of the Gadsden museum.

It is one of these works, No. III, [1] that Jesse finds himself coming back to, again and again. The background of the piece is torn from top to bottom, and bursting through the tear is a wild tangle of blue strips, copper wire and tree branches.

"The seam is a breaking point. It allows simultaneous motion — transition. New energy crosses over," Jesse said. "Our lives are stable and unstable. You have to balance, and move through it."

"Well, now that we have seen each other, if you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you."
— The unicorn on the other side of the looking glass

"Patterns in Time" is Pat's second major exhibit exploring patterns. The first was "Patterns of Place," shown in 2015 at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art in Pat's hometown of Charleston, S.C. It was about the idea of mapping.

To celebrate the beauty of Alabama, Pat constructed three-dimensional "map tables" exploring the 100-mile stretch between Cheaha Mountain and Little River Canyon, the state's highest and lowest points. The tables incorporated a

vast assemblage of natural and manmade objects — rocks, fossils, twigs, metal, glass.

"The maps were reducing reality — like the looking glass," Pat said. "The map is not an actual rendering of what life is, but a mapping of what we see."

This idea of the divide between the actual and the virtual shows back up in "Patterns in Time" — in the guise of a hypercube.

(If a square exists in two dimensions and a cube exists in three dimensions, then a hypercube exists in four dimensions. It's also called a tesseract, and it appears in children's books and Marvel movies as a way to travel to any point in the universe.)

A 9-foot-tall hypercube is the framing device for the centerpiece of the Gadsden exhibit, an installation called "The Philosopher's Wall."

One side of the large, freestanding wall represents the actual world. It incorporates the elements of water and air, fire and earth. A black-and-white-checked path leads into the distance. A human figure appears to be moving through the stages of becoming, being and disappearing.

On the other side of the wall is the virtual world. The figures in the background mirror each other, but this world is an explosion of colors, swirling like cosmic clouds. Light bounces off a crazy arrangement of triangular mirrors.

Connecting the actual and virtual is a Mobius twist made of metallic mesh.

"That connection is important to us," Pat said. "How time connects us to our family past and origins. Connection is one of the things we are seeking."

"The actual is surface. The virtual is depth," Jesse explained. "The virtual is coming out at you. It's something unknown."

"The virtual has colors, vibrancy, intensity," Pat said.

"There are more possibilities," Jesse said.

"It's like Alice in Wonderland," Pat said. "Through the looking glass."

Curiouser and curiouser.

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The 'actual' side of 'The Philosopher's Wall'



The 'virtual' side of 'The Philosopher's Wall'