

# Collins mix

Cress Gallery, River Gallery and River Gallery Sculpture Garden debut exhibits by Jim Collins on Thursday

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ARTS WRITER

**T**hree venues will be displaying 64 works by Signal Mountain artist Jim Collins, beginning Thursday. “I call it a mini-retrospective of selected pieces that I’ve completed during the past 20 years,” he said.

In the Cress Gallery at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, the exhibit will consist of sculptures from his Doll Series and mixed-media collages. At the River Gallery, Mr. Collins will show maquettes, small-scale relief sculpture, drawings and paintings based on his Watcher Series.

And, three-dimensional Watchers will comprise the 2006-2007 River Gallery Sculpture Garden exhibit.

June 2006 also marks the 40th anniversary of Mr. Collins’ arrival in Chattanooga. After graduating from Ohio University in 1966, he accepted the position of assistant professor in the art department at the University of Chattanooga. It was during one of those “particularly boring” faculty council meetings in 1977 that he said the Watcher Series was born.

Aware of a proposal that might place a sculpture in a new park in downtown Chattanooga, he entertained himself during the faculty meeting by sketching the profile view of a life-sized figure seated on a park bench. Although the proposal fell through, Mr. Collins continued with his idea and made the first of many Watchers in 1978.

Watchers have been constructed from mild steel, stainless steel, wood, copper, brass, aluminum and painted steel. Each wears a hat — a ball cap, straw hat or top hat — and is unique according to size, material, color or location.

The 14 Watchers that will debut in the River Gallery Sculpture Garden have never been seen in Chattanooga before.

Inside the River Gallery will be several maquettes for Watchers as well as small-scale relief sculptures of Watchers. A series of drawings in the show was inspired by “Movies of the 1930s,” a book of old movie stills that Mr. Collins found in 1987.

“It occurred to me that by simply changing the chapeau, a new identity could be given to the seated man,” he said.

Using colored pencils, graphite, watercolor and other media, he said he had “great fun” drawing Watchers with 10-gallon cowboy hats, sailor hats, pith helmets, derbys and even the funnel hat from the Tin Man in the “Wizard of Oz.”

Two paintings will also be on view as well as the original sketch of the first Watcher made during that “particularly boring” faculty meeting.

Mr. Collins’ mixed-media collages with assembled frames, 30 of which will be seen in UTC’s Cress Gallery, continue to be one of his favorite series to produce. He initiated this body of work in 1984



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The focal point in “The Murderer,” one of Jim Collins’ mixed-media collages that will be on display in UTC’s Cress Gallery, is a 1934 photograph of Lewis R. Payne, who murdered his mother and brother with an ax.

after resigning from UTC to become a full-time artist.

Beginning with a central image — which might be an antique photograph, postcard or sign — he builds outward and layers found objects and materials to tell a story. Coins, paper currency from foreign countries, cigar wrappers, sheet music, stamps, dice, seed packets and even a hotel room key find their way from antique shops, flea markets or eBay into his collages.

“It’s a very intuitive process and I need to have a large quantity of things to draw from so that an individual item doesn’t become too sacred,” he said.

The final step, and the most enjoyable one he said, is constructing the frame. He uses old wood as often as possible and builds unconventional frames that carry out the theme of the narrative.

Also on display at UTC will be eight sculptures from his Doll Series — Medusa, Nike, Miter and Magic.

Visitors to these shows may see a number of commonalities among the works. These include Mr. Collins’ use of diagonal

lines to create tension, figurative elements, superb craftsmanship, examination of the human condition with its accompanying experiences and humor.

“Always humor,” he said.

“I laugh out loud at some of the things I put together.”

The exhibits at River Gallery and Cress Gallery open on Thursday and continue through June 30. A reception will be held at the River Gallery on Friday from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

The 2006-2007 River Gallery Sculpture Garden exhibit opens Thursday and a reception will be held on Saturday from 4 to 6 p.m. The exhibit will remain on display through June 2007.

River Gallery, corner of Bluff View and High streets, is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 1 to 5 p.m. on Sunday. For information, call 265-5033.

Cress Gallery, at the corner of Vine and Palmetto streets, is open from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

For information, call 425-4600.