

Who Fest brings folk art to Spruill

By Mickey Goodman
For The Crier

Folk art may have been born in the country but it has come of age in upscale city galleries and museums. Funky and fun, naïve and innocent, visionary and intuitive, whimsical and imaginative, it springs from the souls of self-taught artists. Ninety of the country's best will display and sell their works on Saturday and Sunday, May 22 and 23 at Atlanta's first Who Fest at the Spruill Art Gallery.

"Culturally, this is huge. It's a wonderful thing to have in Dunwoody," said Karin Lefler, festival organizer. "Gallery owners and representatives from the folk art museums are coming in just for the event. All the artists are jazzed. They call it a gathering of the tribes."

Artists include Ab the Flagman whose eclectic American flags on wood have become his trademark. He will also play Saturday in his own country rock band, the "X Miss Americas."

Other notable artists are Lorenzo Scott whose visionary religious painting are collected by the Smithsonian, Mr. Imagination, famous for his paint brush masks, Mary Proctor and her door paintings, quilt-maker extraordinaire Chris Clark and others. Most of the artists sell only through galleries and many are represented in museums like Atlanta's High Museum.

"This is a rare opportunity to buy affordable original art and meet the artists," said Lefler.

The event comes on the heels of last year's folk art success at

the Spruill Art Gallery that attracted 40 artists and double the number of art lovers at any previous Spruill festival. The idea for the Atlanta Who Fest took shape when the well-known Finster Fest named for late Georgia artist, Howard Finster, cancelled



A highlight of the Who Fest is an auction of a replica of a Howard Finster original created by his fellow artists.

plans for its Atlanta art show.

Organizers asked Lefler, who has a track record of staging successful art shows, to run with the idea. Initially she called 20 of her favorite artists. Word spread faster than chicken pox. Within a month, she received 90 responses from artists hailing from Pennsylvania to New Mexico.

"I've had to turn down at least 70 for lack of space," she said. "Who knew?"

Response from sponsors has been equally overwhelming. MoonPie and The Coca-Cola Company – the official sponsor or Who-Ha-Da-Da (a fellowship of artists of the Southern genre

influenced by the Da Da movement of the 1920s), Binders and Pearls Art and Gallery in Chattanooga quickly stepped forward. Multi-family Services, Sod and Irrigation Specialists of Atlanta, offered to donate gravel to expand the parking area to accommodate more artists.

One of the highlights of the festival is the unveiling of the World's Largest MoonPie at 1 p.m. on Saturday.

"It's large enough to feed 500 festival-goers," said Lefler. Another highlight is an auction of a replica of a Howard Finster original created by his fellow artists. Proceeds from the auction and Finster-inspired T-shirts go to support Paradise Gardens and Finster Folk Art Gallery in Summerville, Ga., Chattooga County's largest tourist attraction. MoonPies, Cokes and festival food will be available for sale.

Folk art is close to Lefler's heart. A graduate of Dunwoody High School, she was inspired by her art teacher, Carole Hale. She and her husband spent their honeymoon traveling the south's byways to add to her collection. She has organized a number of successful shows at the Spruill Art Gallery and creates her own folk art – house blessings.

"It's particularly important to have cultural events and art in the community where many of the schools have cut the arts from their curriculum," said Lefler. "If I can do anything that helps promote art, it's the best thing I can do with my life."