



KIM KAUFFMAN/SPECIAL

Susan Hensel's artist's book, "My House," is stored in a handmade box shaped like the house. It's on display at Converse College.

Artist's books invite interaction

By KIM ATCHLEY
For the Herald-Journal

At some point in everyone's life, sitting back and taking stock of the past, present, and future becomes a priority.

Personal reflection is part of growing up, of growing toward a future as yet unknown. Artists, by the very nature of their work, learn to be reflective. When an artist's worlds of personal and professional introspection combine, works with a unique depth can be created.

For some, this work takes the form of artist's books.

This evening at Converse College, a national juried exhibition of artist's books by women opens at the Milliken Gallery. The work of 24 artists will be in the exhibit,

which will run through Nov. 20.

Converse College professor Teresa Prater curated the exhibit. Prater recently returned to Converse after a year's sabbatical, during which she completed her own artist's book series along with paintings entitled "Seven Gates of Ritual."

Artist's books are handmade using a variety of creative processes. The technique comes from a centuries-old tradition that has regained popularity with artists in the past two decades, Prater said. They depict images that, when viewed together, are unified by the themes they represent.

WANT TO GO?

WHAT: *Women and Books: Uncovered*, a national juried exhibition of artist's books by women

WHERE: Milliken Art Gallery, Converse College

WHEN: Opening reception, 7-9 p.m. today. The exhibit continues through Nov. 20.

SOMETHING

SPECIAL: Different artists will be coming to work with Converse students during the exhibit. If you would like to know more about the exhibit, artists' books, or classes and workshops, call 596-9177 or 596-9181.

The artist's books focus on issues that have been traditionally associated with women, such as body image, breast cancer, child abuse, marriage, relationships and the home, even housework and the emotions of mothering.

Each artist has brought her own professional background to the works, creating one-of-a-kind and limited-edition works. Most books contain not only images, but also text.

Nontraditional

One of the exciting features of the artist's books is the use of nontraditional materials. Prater points to the work of Julia Harris and Mindy Belloff for examples. A turtle shell contains the handmade pages in Harris' book, "Fertility." Belloff creates books that are suspended from the ceiling.

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Exhibit visitors wear cotton gloves to handle artist's books

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Several of the artists whose work was selected for the show will be at tonight's opening reception.

Sandy Webster will come from Brasstown, N.C. A mixed media artist and writer for many years, artist's books have entered her work in the past five years or so.

Two of her works were selected for the show. "Left Alone" is a small artist's book that deals with the challenges faced by women ending a long-term marriage. "It's about a shared history coming to an

end," Webster said.

Her other work, "An Artist's Book," contains more mixed media techniques. She did the piece as something to leave behind for her children one day to explain her views about being an artist. The book is inside a box. Features of the work include found objects and even a secret compartment, all meant to give explanation to the compulsions faced by an artist to create.

Both works look at a lifetime of being a woman, as well as an artist, said Webster, 57.

Gwen Diehn, professor of art

and art department chair at Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, N.C., has been working with artist's books for several years, as well.

An avid museum visitor, Diehn was first introduced to the art form at the National Museum for Women in the Arts in Washington. The museum hosts an annual exhibit of artist's books.

Now, aside from working on her own creations, she teaches her students about the artistic process.

"There are still a lot of people who don't know what artist's

books are," Diehn said. "People are reluctant to handle the books, but to experience books, they really need to handle them and interact."

Visitors to the gallery are invited to put on cotton gloves. The gloves protect the books but are also provided to let visitors know that it's okay to touch the works. "Look but don't touch," doesn't apply to an exhibit like this.

Both Webster and Diehn, as well as artist Mindy Belloff of New York City, will be working with Prater's students during the run of the exhibit.