

## Visit to Kirk Williams Studio:

From the curb, Kirk Williams unassuming house in Fergus Falls appears to be as normal as the other houses on the block, but inside you step into a world of wonder and imagination. Williams keeps his art studio in the basement and garage, which is overflowing with preserved pirhanas, tiny seahorses, doll parts, and various antiques. I visited Williams at his home to view his many antique assemblage art works, which will be exhibited at the Kaddatz Gallery opening August 24<sup>th</sup>.

The exhibition will be the unveiling of Williams' *The Parade*, a group of circus type characters, and also showcase some *Oil Menageries* and other assemblages. Both the *Oil Menageries* and *The Parade* began about 20 years, and have been growing since. Williams says the creation of these two series started by just "putting together what I was always thinking about". The *Oil Menageries* are large lidded jars and glass containers in which Williams constructs various scenes and then fills with baby oil. The oil distorts the colors and size of the scene, making it look bigger and brighter, in some cases the objects look like they fill the entire space of the jar and the viewer is left to wonder how they even got in there. *The Parade* is a group of modified dolls being pulled by various animals including a chicken and a preserved fish.

There is a definite surrealist influence to Williams work. For example, an assemblage entitled "Lucy's Suitcase" at first appears to be pretty normal. A young girls suitcase has fallen open and the contents are falling out. But look closer and you see a horde of tiny seahorses escaping from the case, peeking out from the other contents. These tiny details create a sense of wonder and playfulness that bring us back to our childhood.

To instill a sense of story in his work Williams uses what he calls Creative Captioning, inspired by Gary Larson's *Far Side* comics. The right caption can turn the assemblage from a scene into a story. For example, Williams shows me his idea for a sculpture consisting of a preserved piranha singing into a microphone, with a doll listening intently. His caption for the work is "Tina always went for the Brazilian Sound," which immediately conjures up images of Tina dancing the night away in a smoky club in South America. Tina becomes more than a doll, as you start to create stories of her many travels and adventures, and you can almost hear the smooth voice of piranha at the microphone.

Williams collects his antiques from friends, auctions, and stores. With the advent of the Internet he finds many of his assemblage materials on eBay. He collects Art Deco items and ocean items. Williams states that his trick is to collect more than you will ever need, than you will always have what you are looking for, although he says: "good mannequins are always hard to find". To start creating his work he sits in a comfy chair in his studio and starts to look around at the items. He doesn't buy items with specific plans; instead the assemblages just start to happen.

Williams uses only authentic antiques, no replicas, in his assemblages. Antiques carry with them a sense of time and place; each one has its own story and its own history that it brings to the finished product. With authentic antiques, Williams notes, it's important to be aware of what you have and understand the value of the individual items.

Williams' work will be exhibited at the Kaddatz Gallery through November, along with costumes from U of M Morris Theater Department made from recycled materials and the entries into the UPcycling Art Contest. A public reception will be held on Thursday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, 5-8pm.