



## Exhibit shows singer-songwriters' creativity extends to visual arts

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**San Antonio Express-News**

*"Some experiences are beyond words but not beyond sharing. Art is quiet music."*

— Monk Wilson, folk singer/ songwriter and artist

When Jerry Jeff Walker isn't singing "Mr. Bojangles" in a sold-out dance hall, he takes photographs.

When the Flatlanders aren't touring, a couple of other of Texas' most acclaimed songwriters dabble in extracurricular pursuits — Butch Hancock draws intricately detailed fantasy scenes with a Bic medium ball-point pen, while Joe Ely tackles social issues with multimedia art.

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Singer-songwriter Nathan Hamilton recharges with a dramatic combination of oil paint and dirt, while Tex-Mex rocker Joe "King" Carrasco finds escape creating funky altars to everyone from pop icons to drug lords.

Nowhere is it more evident that creativity is a bottomless well than at "Musicians That Make Art," a new exhibit at the New Braunfels Museum of Art & Music.

The exhibit spotlights 18 singer-songwriters who find other ways to express themselves by painting, sculpting and making collages.

"They may be world-renowned musicians, but when it comes to their art, they are fascinated, and their imaginations keep them looking at it with a fresh perspective," said museum executive director Charlie Gallagher. "Some may get jaded with music because they're playing songs over and over, where creating (visual) art is a fresh impulse with each piece they make."

While talking to the musicians and piecing the exhibit together, Gallagher searched for a bond for the musician/artists but found only one.

"The common vein is they like to be creative and their drive to communicate goes beyond music," he said. "Most of the musicians in this exhibit were not formally trained; they're just following their passion for creating.

"That means their work is not affected by what other visual artists necessarily are doing, and I think that's refreshing."

Carrasco's work may be the most eclectic.

An avid traveler to Mexico and a folk-art collector, Carrasco began building altars more than a decade ago, using old wood for the boxes, painting them in bright pastels and hand-coloring old photos — of drug kingpin Fred Gomez Carrasco, revolutionary Pancho Villa and musicians Doug Sahm and Sam the Sham & the Pharaohs.

"I started with Day of the Dead stuff and realized you can make an altar to anything," said Carrasco, who lives in Llano. "There are really no rules, and that's the fun about it — it's whimsical. And it's great therapy."

He's even incorporates *petates*, bed rolls made of straw he buys in Mexico and uses for floor mats in his bathroom.

"They wear out after I've jumped out of the shower a hundred times, so I cut them up and use them in altars. They've got that *spirit* in them."

Others reflect more formal training in visual arts, including Karl Lubbering, Hamilton and Sara Hickman.

Art and music are inseparable for Lubbering, who fronts Three Guys Walking, a jazzy pop band.

His paintings all incorporate music in some way — a guitar in the corner, a guy singing to a girl or as a series on drum heads.

Lubbering — whose father is Luis Lubbering, an art professor at the University of the Incarnate Word — sells his works from the bandstand as well as conducting the Sun People Art Show, which has been featuring music and art around San Antonio for several years.

Lubbering was a teenager when he discovered an unusual relationship between art and music.

"When I close my eyes and play the guitar, I see colors," Lubbering said. "When I play a G chord, I see green. A C chord, orange. E, blue. I'm not kidding — it's really bizarre. I just read an article saying that's the way they train you to get perfect pitch, by visualizing colors.

"A long time ago I started thinking there might be a relationship between the vibration of the light wavelengths of colors and the vibration of sound, like cousins in some sort of harmonious relationship. But that's too scientific for me. I'd rather drink a beer and paint."

Hamilton, an Austin roots rocker, dropped out of art school in 1989, picked up the guitar and started writing songs.

But he still paints for himself, often turning to the easel when he gets stuck on a lyric.

His creates his bold, abstract designs by sticking dirt to the canvas with polyurethane and then painting the textured result.

He began experimenting with the concept when an oil painting he was working on fell onto the dirt floor of the studio.

"Being from Abilene, oil and dirt may have some special meaning for me," Hamilton said with a laugh.

He feels less pressure when painting because he knows his songs and recordings are destined to go before an audience.

"I make a record for myself first and foremost, but there's extra effort put in knowing people will be listening," he said. "I just make the art for my walls or the garage."

Art and music are equally satisfying, though.

"I get the same charge and excitement over something in either one that turned out right," he said.

Hickman also uses art to recharge her musical batteries, whether she's cutting her daughter's door into a piece of art or painting to cope with a friend's suicide.

She grew up in Houston with parents who were visual artists and grandparents who were musicians.

"I never watched TV as a kid — we were always doing creative work," said Hickman, who moved to Austin and writes and sings pop/folk/acoustic rock and children's songs.

Like Hamilton, Hickman finds musical inspiration in art. And like Lubbering, she finds music in art and art in music, not thinking of them as separate entities.

When she is painting, she hears music and incorporates words in the work. When she's writing or singing, she senses colors and images, giving her songs more of a visual touch.

"When I run out of music, I paint for a while and it rejuvenates me and I go back to music," she said.

"You'd think because you're using the same part of your brain that you'd be more tired, but it's almost like the difference between smelling flowers and seeing flowers in the field."

Monk Wilson of San Antonio has been writing and singing edgy, impressionistic folk music for years.

His artwork features bold strokes, utilizing bright colors, found materials and sometimes musical instruments.

"Music is a constant and art weaves in and out of my life, in different forms," Wilson said. "You have to find other ways to get the stuff out, to let you express yourself.

"When you're too hard on yourself writing-wise, it's nice to have other outlets.

"Sometimes you just have to wash the dishes or mow the lawn to keep yourself creative."

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