

Dayton Daily News

October 29, 2011

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Using natural elements, photographer conjures up frightful, intriguing images

By Pamela Dillon, Contributing Writer

“I am the one hiding under your bed, teeth ground sharp and eyes glowing red.”

So says a line in Danny Elfman’s spooky song “This Is Halloween.” It would appear that even some adults believe monsters are hiding in the dark recesses of their bedroom. Just ask photographer Doug McLarty, who says he got some unusual remarks during his exhibit opening earlier this month.

“At separate times during the evening, two middle-aged women told me that if they get up in the middle of the night, they have to quickly dive back into the bed so that the ‘monsters’ underneath don’t grab their ankles,” McLarty said.

The Xenia photographer is known in the region for his eye-popping botanical designs, but he decided to try something different this Halloween season using just a little crumpled-up napkin, a few fall leaves and some twigs. The decision grew out of a fluke happening, as most great ideas do.

“I experiment with a lot of different things, and one day I found what looked like faces in some dried leaves,” said McLarty. “Especially those old, dark leaves. They just have a menacing look to them.”

Especially “Monster 4,” a combination of fall leaves that looks as though it’s ready to pounce at any minute. His “Men in the Moons” composition of red, yellow and brown leaves is a mirror image of two ghoulish faces. In another, “The Visitor” has returned to haunt you for throwing him in the trash. McLarty drew two well-placed smudges with a dark pen, and the crumpled-up napkin was reincarnated as a gray ghost.

To get the images he wants, McLarty has to think ‘upside-down.’ He arranges various elements on a scanner covered with a black cloth, so the colors really pop. One pass of the light bar creates the resulting image.

“If I found a particular combination I would try to make an image and set it aside,” said McLarty. “Then when Halloween was coming up, I decided to gather them together and try to make a little series out of it.”

One work looks like two monsters gearing up to fight for world domination. In “Monster 3,” the two look like they are flying; their flight paths spelled out in twigs. Is “Monster 2” an angel who’s ready to join the dark side, or a vampire spreading his cape? Only McLarty knows for sure.

For McLarty, a retired Air Force colonel, keeping his images simple is a kind of magic. Although the compositions he arranges are mostly abstract, the final work is very relatable to viewers because they’re comfortable with the elements: sticks, stones, plants, leaves and flowers.

For the past 40 years, McLarty has photographed landscape and botanical images throughout Europe, the Caribbean, Florida and the western United States.

At first he used primarily black and white film with darkroom processing. About 10 years ago, he switched to digital imagery. He launched his Signature Focus business in 2006, and has an elegant website to show off his art. His works can also be found in art collections across the U.S.

McLarty’s work was featured in the August/September 2011 issue of At Home magazine. He is scheduled to present more than 40 works at the Cleveland Botanical Gardens on March 2 to April 15, 2012.

“We didn’t plan on doing a big, formal exhibit. We just tacked it up; it was a fun thing to see people’s reactions,” McLarty said. “Everyone has a story about creaking noises and things that go bump in the night.”



The Visitor



Men in the Moons



Monster 2



Monster 4