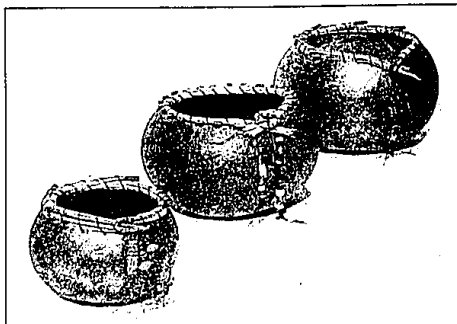
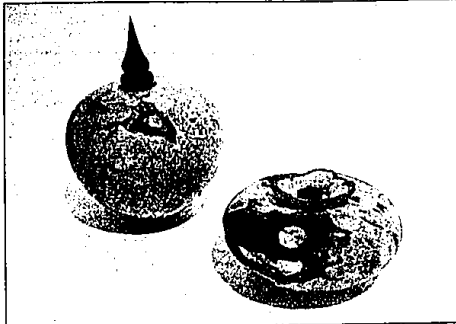




Gourd vessels by Lois Bell at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center.



John and Joan Watkins created these turned wood vessels.

Find the perfect gift at BBAC's holiday show

Need coal for that special someone's Christmas stocking this year? Rebecca and Kim Bearden may have just what you're looking for.

"It's coal soap. It looks like a piece of coal and has little bits of gold in it. It's great with kids in the bathtub. It foams up black and rinses out of the tub," said soap-maker Kim Bearden of Trenton. "Our coal soap is unique. There's no one else I've seen making it."

Or for a more fanciful holiday greeting, try their "goldfish in a bag" soap.

"The fish looks like it's swimming, but it's actually soap. The bag is soap. It's our signature piece and the most favorite pet we've ever had," Bearden said with a laugh.

The sisters-in-law will sell their handmade soaps at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center's annual holiday show from Friday, Nov. 22-Sunday, Dec. 1.

Sharon Stanton, the art center's special event and volunteer coordinator, said the Bearden's soaps "fit in well"

"Some artists are invited to participate and some are juried in. We're excited because we have lots of new works."

Sharon Stanton
Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center

with the holiday shop, which also includes jewelry, clothing, blown glass, garden and home decor, ceramics, holiday merchandise and more, produced by 143 artists.

"We have a juried process over the summer. This year, we have more artists... it's up to 25 artists from last year," Stanton said. "Some artists are invited to participate and some are juried in. We're excited because we have lots of new works."

The 20-year-old holiday shop's preview night takes on a new format this year, too. The Shop and Champagne opening reception, which runs from 6:30-9 p.m. today, Thursday, Nov. 21, will give shoppers an opportunity to buy gifts, sample hors d'oeuvres and taste wine. Tickets are \$35 for art

center members and \$45 for nonmembers. The \$100-a-ticket patrons will receive a special handcrafted memento of the evening.

"There will be food stations and wine stations," Stanton said. "It's a combination of fun activities - eating and shopping."

"We tried to get a lot of affordable gifts. It goes from \$2 - we've got these cute hand-painted gingerbread magnets, necklaces and pins - all the way up to \$900."

Ruth Heginbottom of Troy has sold her paper and fiber art at the holiday show every year since she started her business, Belhoboxes, in 1995.

"Last year, I hired my niece," Heginbottom said. "She makes wonderful items. She has expanded our line tremendously. She makes adorable purses. We make jewelry boxes, photo albums, custom portfolios for corporations and individuals and we just incorporated scarves into the line."

Heginbottom and her niece, Margie St. Onge, also create personalized journals and custom albums.

"Margie and I are tactile people and I think the richness of

fiber and paper is enticing," she said. "She's an accomplished artist who also did a lot of work in industrial design."

"I'm a musician and went into retail so I could continue to play my viola," Heginbottom works for Millers Art Supplies in Ferndale, where she also shows her art.

"When I was a kid, the first boxes I made were for Barbie so she could visit Ken. I've always made boxes to put things in. I wasn't satisfied with what I had seen on the retail shelves."

Her functional art pieces range in price from \$5 to \$300 and are shown in galleries in Charlevoix and Colorado. The Bearden sisters-in-law sell their soaps in Saline, Trenton and Northville, among other Michigan locations.

"It's fun and relaxing. There's a calmness to it," Kim Bearden described the soap-making process.

Rebecca Bearden concentrates on soaps for children and for the bath. Her sister-in-law crafts soap with the "art in the bar."

"You can marble the soap colors together and they come out looking beautiful," Kim Bearden said. "We've always looked at what we do as an art. It's an affordable art."

The Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center's holiday shop is open 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and noon to 4 p.m. Sunday at the center,



Fiber pieces, like this art by Marcella Bourean, will be on display the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center's Holiday Shop.

located on Evergreen north of 14 Mile. The center's student pottery show will be held from Nov. 22-25 during holiday shop hours. The holiday shop will be closed Thanksgiving Day. For more information, call (248) 644-0666.

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