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History museum exhibit features Fairhope satire from celebrated artist Craig Sheldon and cartoonist Bill Dealy

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By [Russ Henderson, Press-Register](#)





An array of wooden "critters," distinctive sculptures by the late Fairhope artist Craig Sheldon, are on display at the Fairhope Museum of History.

(Michelle Rolls, Press-Register)

FAIRHOPE, Alabama -- Satirical works by two late local artists, one of them an established legend and the other a lesser-known cartoonist, are now on display at the Fairhope Museum of History.

Hundreds attended a reception Friday at the museum celebrating the opening of the first-ever public display of 15 satirical wooden sculptures by the celebrated artist Craig Sheldon as well as several cartoons by Bill Dealy that poke irreverent fun at some of the town's founding figures.

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"Fairhope has waited 51 years for these pieces by Craig to come home from out west," said Dean Mosher, Sheldon's son-in-law.

Family members have long called a group of Sheldon's wooden sculptures "critters that didn't make it onto Noah's Ark," and he carved dozens of them during his 50-year career as a sculptor, carpenter, philosopher, playwright, intellectual, activist, writer, husband and father in town, Mosher said.

In the 1960s, Sheldon met an Arizona man -- a fellow supporter of Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater, a 1964 presidential nominee -- who bought a dozen of the critters, Mosher said.

The sculptures later passed to the man's daughter, Del Jean West, Mosher said.

"We tried to get them from her a decade ago, but it didn't work out," Mosher said.

In 2000, Mosher served as curator for a massive artistic retrospective on Sheldon at the Eastern Shore Art Center. The show brought together about 50 major carved or sculpted works, plus another 50-plus pieces and artifacts that reveal the aspects of Sheldon's personality.

A year ago, West called the Moshers again, this time trying to sell them the sculptures for about \$1,000 apiece. Raising that kind of money in the current economic climate proved impossible, Mosher said.

Two weeks later, West's son called to say that his mother had passed away and that he wanted to donate the sculptures back to the family, provided they could fetch them. In May, Mosher and his wife Pagan, Sheldon's daughter, drove to Arizona and brought them back.

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Each sculpture is a work of personal caricature or political commentary, Mosher said.

The "Ecclesiastical Stowaway," for instance, represents a particular person that Sheldon knew and regarded as a "self-righteous hypocrite," Mosher said. He has his nose in the air and is trying to sneak past St. Peter with a pair of "small wings held onto his back by crude hinges," he said.

Other sculptures include the "Green Persimmon Eater," based on a poor worm Sheldon found eating its way through an unripe persimmon, and "Harmonicus Salivus" a satirical self-portrait of himself blowing a harmonica with saliva running down his chest.

The second exhibit is of cartoons by Bill Dealy, who was 10 years old when he came to the new town of Fairhope in 1898.

Dealy, the son of early Fairhope pioneer Paul K. Dealy, began making mischievous drawings of serious town founders and posting them on the town bulletin board.

One of them shows a few high-minded founders of the utopian village talking to each other about what a wonderful spot the area will make for the city, while in the woods nearby a few crouching locals hold rifles and debate whether they should shoot the "Yankees."

For more information, call the museum at 251-929-1471.

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