

ART STYLES



CARVING A NICHE

Folk artists revive old-time art form

By LANI DENTON
Staff writer

Hobos and tramps bartered for their necessities with carvings they made while passing away the time on trains, traveling from place to place in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The pieces resulting from these carvings are unique, hand-layered and notched or carved out of found objects such as cigar boxes, fruit crates and pallets.

Now these old pieces are hard to come by.

But Murfreesboro artist Daniel Strawser Jr. preserves the art form in his own unique designs he creates from recycled objects.

This fourth-generation Pennsylvania German folk artist transforms picture frames, boxes, wall pockets and even desks into works of art similar to the tramp art style of long ago.

A sampling of his work is on display in a joint exhibition with his folk artist father, Daniel Strawser Sr., through Sept. 30 at The Arts Center of Cannon County in Woodbury.

Dropping by the arts center recently, Strawser opened one of his boxes to reveal the cigar label still adhered to the sides and back of the drawers.

"I like the uniqueness of it and making something nice out of something that would be thrown away," Strawser said.

Growing up in an artistic family — his mother Barbara is a folk painter — Daniel Jr. was encouraged by his parents to use his artistic talents.

"My parents were into antiques and I first became interested in the style while looking around with them, and my



DNJ photo by Lani Denton

Daniel Strawser Jr., left, and his father, Daniel Sr., shows some of their folk art carvings on display at The Arts Center of Cannon County through Sept. 30.

grandfather on my mother's side pushed me into it a little," Daniel Jr. said. "I liked the tramp art and started doing it in the mid-'80s."

Daniel Jr. said he moved to Murfreesboro from Pennsylvania to attend MTSU's Recording Industry Program in 1987.

It seems for both father and son that artistry eventually won out over prior careers as they now rely on their art work as their main source of income.

"I got into a carvings class taught by a fellow who had taught biology to me, and since we knew each other, he egged me on," Daniel Sr. said. "I started in the late '60s."

Daniel Sr. took out the pocket knife he uses to carve most of his eagles, sheep, cats and other characters.

He likened his method to an

old tale about a woodcarver who explained that he carved an owl from wood by just carving away everything that is not an owl.

"I'm still learning," Daniel Sr. said. "The first things never turned out right."

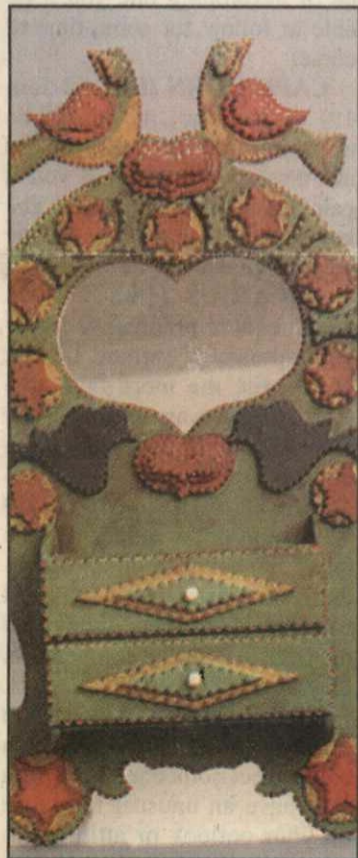
The elder Strawser uses basswood in random lengths and widths because of its softness, he said.

Daniel Jr. finds his materials in old cigar boxes, crates and pallets.

"I usually start with birch plywood because it's really strong," Daniel Jr. said. "When I can find the old stuff, I use it. The tramp style started in the late 1800s when the tax act supposedly caused an abundance of redwood and mahogany cigar boxes."

(See Carving, page 3D)

WHO: Daniel Strawser Sr. and Daniel Strawser Jr.
WHAT: Folk art exhibit
WHEN: Through Sept. 30
WHERE: The Arts Center of Cannon County



This mirrored catchall and the clock were carved by Daniel Strawser Jr.