

Appleton is first exhibitor

By ALICE DuPONT

Times Editor

Beth Appleton and David Harbaugh said they felt as if they were back at home Monday afternoon as they hung artwork in preparation for the opening of the Gadsden Art Center. The couple now make their home on St. George's Island after spending many years living and working in Gadsden County.

Appleton said she likes the island better, but only because her studio is bigger. "The people here are like family. We have been fortunate to live in a number of places we feel we can call home," Appleton said. But, Gadsden County has a special place in the heart of the couple.

The friendships they made here and seeing those friends on a regular basis is what they miss most about living in Gadsden County. Both Appleton and Harbaugh worked parttime at the *Gadsden County Times* while they lived here on a beautiful piece of wooded property north of the city limits.

Appleton's work has evolved and, with the exception of a few early pieces, the show will consist almost entirely of her works that feature bright, beautiful watercolor/cut paper assemblage.

"This has truly been a labor of love," Appleton said. The signature piece, called "Back to the Garden" has taken since January to complete.

"Back to the Garden" is very personal for me because it is loaded with symbolism, Appleton said. More and more, my life experiences have surfaced in the works. My artwork then often becomes a diary most often capturing an event, feeling or place in time like a certain song or smell that will pull one back in memory.

In "Back to the Garden" Appleton said that the flowers in certain groupings represent her mother and her three aunts, the zinnias that

represent her sister, the carpet flowers for her father and the day lilies that represent special friends.

The piece, Appleton said, is also a tribute to the memory of gardens she visited in Gadsden County that belonged to special friends like Julia Woodward, Sara Golinvéaux, and Lora Lee Thomas. She said she was meant to do the signature piece because she only finished it at the last minute.

"Back to the Garden" to me means celebrating a homecoming. A double meaning also includes getting back to the things that have always given me joy and personal inner peace," she said.

While she says she doesn't have a favorite garden, Appleton sees beauty in every garden as it reflects its designer. "I am even able to enjoy the ends of summer gardens, unkempt and a bit wild, weeds intruding. I think this piece is a sense of that," she said.

Appleton said there is nothing in particular she wants viewers to come away with after seeing her work. "I know how I feel, but I do not expect nor wish the viewer to have the same experiences that I do. When I look at it, it looks effortless, like a good ballet should. My hope is that there will be as many reactions to it as there are viewers who will bring their own experiences into it as they see the artwork," she said.

In recent years the couple participated in shows throughout the United States earning recognitions and awards for the unique papercuts. "The last show we participated in was in Coconut Grove in February and we're been pretty much at home," Harbaugh said.

The show will run from September 17 to October 29. For more information or to arrange a special showing, call the gallery at 850-875-4866.



Detail of "Back to the Garden."