Smithsonian traveling exhibition to be displayed at Georgia Highlands in Rome

STAFF REPORT

Digital technology reveals the beauty of nature in Robert Creamer’s latest work, “Transitions: Photographs by Robert Creamer.” The exhibition created by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service in collaboration with the National Museum of Natural History, will open at Georgia Highlands College’s Floyd campus Monday, Sept. 14, in the Lakeview Building’s art gallery. Open from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8 a.m. until noon on Friday, the exhibit will run through Monday, Nov. 23. It showcases how beauty can be found in the most unexpected places.

Robert Creamer is renowned for using contemporary digital technology to convey melancholy beauty. “I’m challenging the traditional notion of beauty as something perfect and flawless,” said Creamer about his photographs, many of which show flowers in various stages of decay.

Transitions is the seventh SITES exhibition hosted by GHC over the past four years.

“Through our continuing partnership with SITES, we’ve been able to enrich the academic life of the college and the cultural life of the community by bringing these beautiful, insightful, educational and entertaining exhibits to the people of Rome/Floyd County and the surrounding area,” said John Spranza, GHC’s director of student life.

In creating the works for the exhibition, Creamer traded his usual camera for a flatbed scanner. His compositions use flora and fauna that are placed directly on the scanner in aesthetic arrangements or suspended over it. The resulting detail is eerily lifelike, yet incredibly expressive. Creamer’s subjects are drawn from the research collections at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History, the Fairchild Tropical Botanical Gardens in Florida, and the Echo Hill Outdoor School in Maryland.

“The use of a digital scanner instead of a camera brings a very different outlook to this exhibit, and this unique use of technology makes the very nature of these photos different from any other previous exhibit we have hosted,” Spranza said. “Visitors will be amazed at the clarity and color of these pictures. Part of the fun of the exhibit is figuring out the subject matter of the photo.”

Transitions features 39 of Creamer’s high-resolution images created exclusively for the exhibit. Many are paired to show a subject in transition. This exhibition also features a video by videographer Jeannie Yoon about Creamer’s scanning and printing.

Robert Creamer’s association with the Smithsonian began when he scanned a variety of objects and specimens at the Naturalist Center, an educational outreach facility of the National Museum of Natural History located near Leesburg, Va. That experience led to scans of scientific collections housed at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.

Creamer has transitioned multiple times himself during the 30 years of his professional photography career. His talents include botany, photography, natural history and teaching. He is also a widely published fine art and architectural photographer. He started using the scanner on a whim in 2002 when he found a dead hummingbird in his Maryland neighborhood. After experimenting with the bird, he continued to scan plants and animals from his backyard and those that were brought home to him by his children and even his cat. Those initial scans inspired his artistic vision catapulting him to a new realm of visual art. He began selecting material based on his intuition of how it would develop in the short time ahead and how it would look like scanned. He monitored his specimens closely looking for the exact moment that some new point of view was revealed.

SITES has been sharing the wealth of Smithsonian collections and research programs with millions of people outside Washington, D.C., for more than 50 years. SITES connects Americans to their shared cultural heritage through a wide range of exhibitions about art, science and history, which are shown wherever people live, work and play.

After the exhibit closes in Rome, it will continue on an 11-city national tour through 2011. Groups may schedule dates and times by appointment outside the regular schedule by contacting the Office of Student Life at 706-295-6363 or e-mailing jspranza@highlands.edu. Admission is free.