

Echo Miriam Meyer creates art using old vinyl records. Her work has been on display at Donkey Coffee, a coffee shop in downtown Athens.

Messenger photo by John Halley



Revamping vinyl

Local artist turns old records into works of art

By MATT GALLAGHER
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Some artists are called to the canvas, but an Athens-area artist was summoned to vinyl.

For more than eight years, Echo Miriam Meyer has been making record art — smashing vinyl records to pieces and then reforming them to make the base of a canvas that she then paints over to form the images of famous musicians, from Louis Armstrong to Jimi Hendrix to Ludwig Van Beethoven.

Calling her collection of record art “The Vinyl Café,” Meyer was inspired to make the series after viewing the work of

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Echo Miriam Meyer

a Canadian artist who utilized pieces of recording equipment into his art.

The range of musicians is great — John Coltrane, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, Tina Turner, Billy Holiday,

Tom Petty, John Lennon and Yoko Ono. But the idea and processes are similar — slaughter a few used records from the New-To-You Shoppe and reform them into art.

“I love music, and I love the people behind that music,” Meyer said. “I started with the musicians who meant a lot to me, and just sort of went from there.”

The images are often painted in somber blues, purples and browns to convey the music they are personifying — blues and purples for the blues, brown for the classical sound, reds and other colorful colors for bright rock and roll.

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The color choices took a little experimentation. The image of Johnny Cash ended up in the waste bin after too much orange caused the country singer to look, as Meyer freely admits, like Odo on the science-fiction TV show "Deep Space Nine." Only a few of the records are from the actual artist depicted in the artwork. Except for an occasional Louis Armstrong 45 that Meyer incorporated into her portrait of the jazz horn player, most of the records are generic thrift-store finds, with labels shaded to conceal their identity. Finding records has never been a problem, and not much expense either, Meyer said. She started buying by the crate for 25 cents a piece at New-Ton. When they learned she was a broke artist out to make art from the records, the thrift store cut her price and practically gave them away. Through the process, Meyer learned that not all records are the same, and for an artist trying to split a record to pieces, "unbreakable" is not necessarily a good thing. Older records broke the way newer records proved more challenging. "Old records gave a really good shatter," Meyer said. "The new ones tended to bend and stretch. They needed scissors and clippers. They were hard to split."

Meyer's record art opened her to new tastes. She decided to paint Pearl Bailey because she found the blues singer visually striking. When she discovered a random Pearl Bailey record in the stacks, she saved it from the donation pile and gave it a listen.

"I loved the sound and the rhythm of her voice," Meyer said. "She was so beautiful to listen to. She just sounded so cool."

Meyer has also learned an appreciation for vinyl, besides as a good stand-in for canvas. Years of working on The Vinyl Café have inspired her to put her phonograph player to good use. While she complains that albums require listening every 20 minutes or so, she appreciates what she calls "a better sound."

"I really like the crackle of a good record," Meyer said. "They sound better. There is a richness and lowness that's not perfect, but in a strange way, it's really better to listen to."

The Vinyl Café had been displayed at The Coffee in downtown Athens for the past couple of months, but has been taken down temporarily for the next few days to allow for floor repairs in Donkey's back room. The Vinyl Café will be up for display this Friday and remain until next Friday, 20.