

## 'Ponderings:' AU alumna exhibits work

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[CONCORD, NH] The Beard Pond Art Group announced that they will be holding a new exhibit entitled "Ponderings" from May 16 through June 30, 2006 at the Conservation Center in Concord. Haven't heard of the Beard Pond Art Group? It's a group of four local women artists who have been meeting since 2000 to support and inspire each other in their artistic endeavors. Members include fiber artists Cheryl Christner of New Boston, Gail Hersey of Weare, wildlife artist Rosemary Conroy of Weare, and painter Karen Salerno of New Boston. After years of meeting and sharing techniques, the four artists decided to collaborate on this creative exploration of their favorite local ecosystem. The show will include both two- and three-dimensional creations incorporating traditional and non-traditional techniques, all centered around "the life aquatic." An opening reception will be held on Friday, May 19th from 5 to 8 pm. For directions and more information, please call 603-224-9945 or visit [www.forestsociety.org](http://www.forestsociety.org). Regular viewing hours are Monday through Friday, from 9 am to 4 pm. The main feature of the show is something the artists have been calling their "fish wall." For the past two years, they have been passing around five rubber casts of fish, which are traditionally used for a Japanese print-making technique called "gyotaku." The artists, who are all nature-lovers, only selected species that are found locally, including bass, trout, pike, blue gill, and perch. The goal? To each come up with four to five artworks, approximately 12 x 12 inches, to fill their virtual pond, or "fish wall." While a few of the artists experimented using print-making techniques, the rubber fish mostly acted as a jumping off point for paintings, drawings, collages, fiber pieces and more. Gail Hersey, who creates assemblage pieces using polymer clay, paint, fiber and other objects, made several innovative three-dimensional pieces that explored fossil and literary themes. Cheryl Christner, who specializes in a Japanese dyeing method known as "shibori," created several silk hangings that flow and shimmer like light dappling across a pond. Inspired by their bold creativity, Rosemary Conroy, who usually paints in oils and acrylics, produced several mixed media paintings, including one encaustic collage piece. Karen Salerno pushed her own envelope too, expanding her normally traditional painting and drawings to explore bold colors and fantastical renderings of her chosen fish species. "It was such a blast," says Salerno. "While each piece is so different, they really hang together because of the common theme even though you may have to look hard in a couple of pieces to find the fish element." In addition to the group wall, the artists will also have several individual pieces each, also based upon the pond theme. These too cover a wide variety of mediums for which each artist is well known. One highlight will be a large 7' x 7' silk shibori wall hanging representing the pond that will hang from the ceiling of the exhibit room at the Conservation Center. To round out the show, the artists also collaborated on a piece, that they have been calling "Pondess." "She's become our mascot," explains Cheryl Christner. "We wanted her to represent the spirit of Beard Pond (a small lake on Christner's property where the idea of establishing the art group was first hatched.)" The small sculpture incorporates natural objects and materials. Each artist only has seen her once before passing the sculpture onto the next person, who is seeing her for the first time. "It's been quite a challenge for me to think three-dimensionally but really fun," says Rosemary Conroy. "It's evolved into a very dramatic yet wonderfully natural piece artwork." The final version of the Pondess won't be revealed even to most of the artists themselves until the opening night of the show on Friday, May 19th. In addition to the artwork, the exhibit opening will also play-off the creative collaborative atmosphere. Hattie White, Christner's daughter, is catering the event and promises to present delectables keeping with the aquatic theme. Several spouses, friends, and children of the artists have even agreed to be "waiters in waders" for the opening to further support the festive and fishy nature. "Having fun while being creative is basically what our group is all about," notes Hersey. "Who says you can't be supportive while still being a little silly?" So what's up next for this artistic quartet? No definite plans are in the work, but they are looking for another venue to showcase this exhibit or perhaps, another themed collaboration. In the meantime, they'll continue their monthly meetings, sharing techniques, critiquing work, and above all, challenging each other to even greater artistic heights. And of course, taking an occasional dip in that very inspiring pond.