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Museum/Wilson documentary to be screened at Tupelo Film Festival

A Fayette woman's one-hour documentary tribute to another Fayette woman will be screened at the Tupelo Film Festival in May and then again at The Female Eye Film Festival in Toronto, Canada in June.

Alexandra Branyon's film "Treasures from the Rubble," is the story of how

artist Lois Wilson lived for her art despite dispiriting poverty and ultimately helped found the Fayette Art Museum through a promise she extracted from Jack Black, the town's newspaper editor.

Branyon is not only the film's creator, she is its director and provides the voice for Lois in the film.

She first learned of the collaboration of Black and Wilson when Branyon was in Tuscaloosa in 2000 to pick up a Distinguished Career Award from The Society for the Fine Arts at the University of Alabama, her alma mater. She was introduced by Black, who had

•See FILM, Page 3A



Film

Continued from Page 1A

been publisher and editor of the Fayette County Broadcaster when Branyon was an 11th grader and editor of the Fayette County High School paper.

That evening Black told her that for the last 35 years he had been creating an art museum in Fayette from the collection of Lois Wilson.

The story intrigued Branyon and she told Black she would do a documentary about the museum and Wilson.

She spent the next 11 years filming, researching, assembling editing and finishing the film.

With such a rich background in the arts, Branyon was certainly qualified to do the job.

She has done summer stock, dinner theater and musical comedy. She has studied composition at Juilliard Extension Division in New York, voice with a Metropolitan Opera tenor and played piano in a theater orchestra in Honolulu and studio bands in New York. She was in the legendary Lee Strasberg's private acting class.

She is a member of the original company of the New York branch of great improvisation group Second City.

She is an award-winning dramatist and a member of the Dramatists Guild. She has taught playwriting at the New School for Social Research in New York. (Actresses who have performed her work include Uta Hagen and Ruby Dee).

She used all these experiences in making "Treasures From the Rubble," directing, filming, writing the script and song lyrics, playing piano on the soundtrack, reading voice-over narration and finding other talent.

About the film's subject

Lois Wilson was born in poverty and lived most of her life poor. She was drawn to art and used everyday items to paint and draw on.

Little did she know at the time that she was following in the tradition of Outsider Artists who created art on found objects.

Wilson studied architecture at Auburn University in 1924 on a scholarship. She then studied at an art school in Boston on another scholarship. In 1930 her art education continued in Europe through a gift from a wealthy friend.

In 1935 she settled in New York. Because she served in the Women's Army Corps during World War II, starting in 1949 she studied for three years at the Art Students League in New York City on the GI Bill.

Wilson moved to Yonkers and when they started bulldozing slums around her, she started using the refuse to paint on.

She painted on all types of wood, from sides of drawers to table legs, and from fan blades to toilet seats.

It was at this time she decided to kick out everything she had learned about art and to stop trying to copy other artists' styles and notions of art.

She became like the folk artists she admired and spent the rest of her life creating art from found objects.

As old age approached, Wilson found she had amassed a huge collection of her own art and fellow artists' work. She wanted to protect the work and looked to her roots in Alabama to find that protection.

She started corresponding with Black, who was impressed with her passion for art and antimaterialism.

Wilson told Black that she

wanted her hometown to have her collection - but she wanted it to be kept intact and in a permanent space for showing in Fayette.

Black gave his word to her that he would somehow set up a permanent collection.

The Wilson collection came to Fayette in 1969, and Black spent the next three decades shepherding the Fayette Art Museum into its own.

"Treasures in the Rubble" will show Fayette's unique journey to its own art museum and the extraordinary people who made it happen.

The film will be shown on Thursday, May 17 from 2:40-3:45 p.m. at the Tupelo Film Festival at the Lyric Theatre located at 201 North Broadway in Tupelo, Miss.

Each year the festival brings together dozens of films and hundreds of film fans from around the world.

For more information about tickets go to www.tupelofilmfestival.net or call 1-800-533-0611 or 662-841-6521.

For more information about the event you may also visit treasures-fromtherubble.com

The Fayette Art Museum is issuing a special invitation for anyone from Fayette to go be a part of the documentary's showing. Branyon (formerly Nell Gravlee) will be attending the festival as well as many supporters of the Fayette Art Museum.

The Fayette Art Museum Board of Directors along with the Civic Center Board of Directors will be hosting a 'Red Carpet' Event for the documentary in Fayette in early fall.

A date has not been set yet, but an announcement will be made this summer.