



Mississippi's own "art family" of the 21st century: acclaimed artists Bill Dunlap and Linda Burgess with their daughter Maggie. Bill's iconic Delta Dog painting greets visitors to The Alluvian Hotel in Greenwood.

American Family DUNLAP

Throughout history, there have been "art families"—in 16th century Italy, father and daughter Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi; in 20th century America, father and son Andrew and Jamie Wyeth; and closer to home in the Mississippi Delta, father and son, who are both working today, Marshall and Jason Bouldin.

However, Linda Burgess, Bill Dunlap and Maggie Dunlap might have the monopoly on the father, mother, and daughter "art family." All three are visual artists working in similar mediums, but each one's work is quite different from the other. Their recent three-person show at Greenwood's Gallery Point Leflore gave a glimpse into how this family works together and apart.

BY MAUDE SCHUYLER CLAY • PHOTOGRAPHY BY LANGDON CLAY

LINDA: Landscapes of the Mind

Linda Burgess, who was born in Coral Gables, Florida, and spent her childhood summers in Alabama with her father's family, returned to the art world and began painting again after a hiatus spent raising her daughter and writing. (She has written for *Art in America*, *ArtNews Magazine*, *The Washington Review*, *Art & Antiques Magazine*, and other periodicals, and is currently at work on her second screenplay.) She says artists such as the Luminists Frederic Church and John Singer Sargent influence her painting:

"They make us feel what it was like to be there. There is a depth of content in their work and a deftness of hand that I greatly admire. In addition, the very small paintings of Edouard Vuillard and those of Degas intrigue me. I marvel at their ability to capture a vast scene in a painting the size of an open book. There's an intimacy one



"Bob's Milk" by Linda Burgess

experiences with a painting that is small enough to hold in your hands, like a letter, that you don't experience with a large painting. For this reason, my paintings are purposefully small—and in essence, readable."

One of Linda's paintings shown in the recent Gallery Point Leflore show is "Bob's Milk," depicting a brightly colored cardinal with a "Motel" sign. Linda says this could

be a memory from her childhood, "of a day when the sky was especially blue and clear, and maybe from the backseat of her parents' car" when she caught a glimpse of a beautiful bird and a passing sign by the side of the road. With this painting she has captured a moment in time as one might remember it, but she does not try to depict a verbatim portrayal of a place or thing. The term she uses for her painting is "landscapes of the mind." Using gesso-prepared paper that is mounted on wood, she mixes oil paint with conte crayon, prismacolor, oil pastels and watercolor. Her most recent work, using images from ancient Roman frescos, mosaics, and architectural ruins, is a direct result of the family's Visiting Artists Residency at the American Academy in Rome last November. (Cleveland, Mississippi, native Bill Franklin and his wife, Professor Carmela Virillo Franklin, are the directors of the AAR.)

Bill wanted his work to be seen, as opposed to having it stored away in some museum's vault.

BILL: The Renaissance man

Bill Dunlap spent “his wonder years” in Belzoni and Moorhead, but mostly grew up in Mathison in Webster County, where he still owns a family house. In 1965 he went to Mississippi College, a place he says “had Barry Hannah in one corner and William Faulkner in the other—and quite a few fundamentalists in between,” where he studied, among other things, art. Dunlap’s paintings have been shown in galleries and museums all over the world (as have Linda’s), but perhaps his most famous Delta accomplishment is the huge painting in the lobby of Greenwood’s Alluvian Hotel, “Landscape Askew: Delta Dog Trot.” Using a custom built canvas especially made to fit the space, he was commissioned by Washington, D.C., architect Stephen Perkins, who designed The Alluvian. They had discussed, long before there was an actual hotel, the idea of a large “populist painting” that would contain specific names such as the Tallahatchie and other local rivers, but one they also both hoped would be a “departure point” and would strongly encourage viewers to recall and embellish their own Delta stories. The horizon in this painting is strangely, but not alarmingly, tilted. A Delta Dog looms large in the foreground with a friendly “king of the hill” stance, and he has eyes—not unlike the Mona Lisa—that seem to follow one around the lobby. Dunlap says the Alluvian work is especially important to him, as he wanted to “ambush a variety of viewers.” Chiefly, he wanted this work to be seen, as opposed to having it stored away in some museum’s vault. Dunlap uses Renaissance techniques, substituting ancient oils for modern materials like polymer and metallic paint, powdered pigments and watercolor. Since polymer is a plastic resin and dries rather quickly, he paints in many layers and calls his technique a “Plastic Sandwich.”



As a teenage visual artist, Maggie's illustrations and paintings often sport attitude and are influenced by pop culture.

MAGGIE: The ever-budding prodigy

At fourteen, Maggie Dunlap is already an accomplished artist who has exhibited, lectured, and illustrated her own book, *The Four Dog Blues Band*, published by the Mississippi Museum of Art in 2007. [She and Greenville and New Orleans author

far: music. “I have a strange and eclectic taste in music, and it definitely plays a big role in my art making. I always have my iTouch going while making art, and when choosing titles, I’ll usually use lyrics from the songs I was listening to while making the piece.

“I am a big fan of comic books and graphic novels, but lately I’ve spent a lot of time on classical drawing, so my style is growing more mature”

– Maggie

Julia Reed are currently discussing plans for a new children’s book of their respective dogs.] Maggie’s work at Gallery Point Leflore featured a fashionable, canine-like female called Deva, based on her own dog Snitch, a whippet with “major attitude.”

Maggie says popular culture plays a big role in her work. She is inspired by fashion, horror movies, and her biggest influence by

“I am also a big fan of comic books and graphic novels, but lately I’ve spent a lot of time on classical drawing, so my style is growing more mature,” laughs Maggie, who is also drawn to the stage and is an accomplished actress. She has recently been accepted to DASH, the prestigious Design and Art High School in Miami.

Being a fashion illustrator/designer

might be in her future, especially since there is a Fashion Design program at her future high school. She is also interested in doing a comic book or graphic novel of her own, and plans on pursuing as many fields of art and design as possible.

Some of her influences as an artist are Luis Diaz; Tim Burton’s movies, animation, and illustration; James Ensor; Kara Walker; the costume design of Colleen Atwood; Edward Hopper; and Mississippi artist Wyatt Waters.

When asked about Maggie’s peripatetic, unorthodox school schedule over the last 14 years, Linda says, “As parents, we’ve always said we are not going to let school get in the way of her education.” So, they have had no qualms about taking her out of school to travel or engage in professional pursuits. Since Maggie has been in pre-school, they have divided their time between McLean, Virginia, and Coral Gables, Florida. She always started school in September in Virginia, and then transferred to Florida each January. Maggie was home-schooled when she was in 4th grade so they could travel to Thailand and Cambodia.

Maggie adds, “Growing up with artist parents means growing up in an artist community. I was never a stranger to galleries, museums, and other artist’s studios. It was a unique childhood, but I wouldn’t have had it any other way.”

This talented, energetic, and roving threesome seems in many ways to fit the mold of other “art families” in history. But as much as they are together, they all work in their own distinct ways apart from each other. As a family that paints, they don’t really influence each other as to subject or approach, but they do use each other as “extra sets of eyes” for opinions and insight into their work. If any similarities in their influences or imagery occur, it happens naturally since they travel together and experience the same things.

But the similarity ends when they get in the studio. As Linda says, “We each have very different approaches to how we work, in our individual styles and in our intent.”

And Bill adds, “One of the best damn things we do together is travel at least twice a year to the Mississippi Delta. What could be more inspiring and rejuvenating to artists than that?” DU