

Family

350 Pageant Lane • Tom Rice, Artist
by Lance Powell

Upon entering the Clarksville-Montgomery County Public Library it is hard not to notice the limestone birds. Sculpted by local artist and Austin Peay State University art alumnus Tom Rice, these limestone birds are surprisingly simplistic, yet elegant and attractive.

The birds range in size from large to small. A plaque posted alongside the sculptures identifies them collectively as "Family". The grouping was completed and placed in the spring of 1983, and subsequently moved with the library to Veterans Plaza in the 1990s, where they remain on display in its foyer.

Rice has become well known for constructing birds of similar fashion. Rice said in 1975 he intended on exhibiting some of his work at the Tennessee Crafts Fair in Nashville and had originally planned to display some pieces of abstract art. However, for fear the general public would not "get" abstract work, he chose to display sculptures of birds, simply because they are universally accepted by differing people from various places. The sculptures were so well received, the artist continued hand-sculpting these remarkable sculptures. Rice said he chose limestone as his medium because he happened upon some discarded limestone blocks. Aiding his decision was the fact the limestone was recyclable and free.

The method of sculpture was a hands-on approach using chisels, rasps, files and sandpaper. Because of the smooth, graceful look of the pieces, it is ironic they were fashioned from such coarse and heavy material.

Regardless, Rice succeeded in his undertaking of turning stone into a refined and sophisticated piece of art.

In addition to "Family" being a superb addition to the collection of civic art located in the community, it is a fitting means to receive the guests and patrons of the Clarksville-Montgomery County Public Library.

