



# Annie Lucille Greene

## WHAT COLOR IS WATER? TALES AND ART ABOUT THE SEGREGATED SOUTH

By Meredith M. Deal Photos and Artwork Provided by Linda Wilburn

Eighty-eight-year-old Annie Lucille Greene is reflective of her artwork. She is woman of cultural heritage and significance. Annie uses stories from her childhood and young adult years as muses for her significant, admired, and often called unique, artwork.

Annie grew up in Hinesville, Georgia, in the 1940s. As a youngster, she would sit for hours quietly doodling with pencils and pens, as her mother played piano for the choir at church. Sharing in her love of art, Annie's mother often bought her small supplies: paper, coloring books, watercolor sets and shared laughter at how Annie drew her subject's exaggerated features. As an adult, Annie began showcasing her paintings on canvas, but has become well-known for her artistic talent in textile pointillism, better known as yarn art.

### ANNIE'S FAMILY OF EDUCATORS

The field of education is the mainstay and building blocks of Annie's family life. Her younger years in Hinesville she fondly recalled, "My parents, Henry William Tarver and Ella Mae Tarver, were in education. Dad went to Georgia State College in Savannah. When I was age two, we moved to Hinesville for 11 years. My younger sister, Ida Florene Tarver (Jones) was born in Hinesville; we loved living there."

"Daddy went to summer school for his masters and mom completed her 4-year college degree. Then they went to Atlanta University to see the one white man over education who suggested they go to Hogansville, Ga., and work in the black school there. My parents were asked (my sister told me later-on) if either could play piano. My mother could play with sheet music and by ear, so they got hired right off." Annie was 12 when her family moved to Hogansville, near LaGrange, Ga.

Annie shared how her dad decided she would go to Spelman College. "But I decided I didn't want to be there," she smiled. "The next year my dad said I was going to go to Albany State. And, I loved it. They did a lot to give me a push; they gave me so much help."

Her mentor, Dean Robert Simmons at Albany State University, was the science department head at the time. "He gave me a small job helping students in the audio-visual department. Back then, we made our own visual

aids, posters and slides. He thought I had talent and encouraged me get my masters and earned go on to New York University. I graduated 1954 from Albany State, from NYU in 1956, and my master's degree in art education in 1961. After Albany State I was offered a job right away. They needed art teachers in La Grange." She had met Oliver Nathaniel Greene, a social studies teacher at the time in Troup County. "We are now married 62 years! Oliver was working on his master's in education from Columbia University back then, so I decided to stay home and keep the kids when they were little."

### ART AND DESEGREGATION

Growing up during segregation, Annie recalled the lack of small town, public school art classes. "Back then," she reflected, "only big city schools had art classes for blacks. As a child we had no art classes. Black schools got art classes and art teachers around the time I came out of college."

Annie began her 35-year teaching career at Ethel Kight High School. "It was the black school in Troup County. I got to teach art as new classes came along like industrial arts, band and typing. Then they changed my school to a junior high after the (mandated) 1970 desegregation. I had storage cabinets full of yarn leftover from high school art weaving and the like, so when the junior high kids came to my art classes, I decided to introduce them to yarn

art from an article I had seen in a magazine. When I showed them what they could do with yarn they got so quiet...I could tell they loved it."

Meanwhile, Annie worked on her personal art. "I took some local art classes doing my own paintings, but then added the yarn art." Yarn art is a slow and dedicated creative process," Annie shared, "It took me six months to do my first two pieces. After doing four, I wanted to go back to painting but then I got invites to exhibit around Georgia. People would ask me to bring the yarn art. So, the public dictated to me what my medium should be. We did many weekend shows on the road all over Georgia selling my art."

Annie said they had no trouble in the first years of school desegregation. "Desegregation opened at a good time for us in the schools back in 1970. With four different school systems in our area: West Point, La Grange, Hogansville and Troup County," she laughed, "we had more trouble when they tried to merge!" Retiring from teaching in 1989, Annie and Oliver have remained in LaGrange. "I've had fantastic students. They try to pick up our lunch tabs at local restaurants and always have kind words for both of us 'golden-agers.'" Since 2017, she has slowed down a bit in exhibiting, "but I'll keep working as long as my eyes don't give out."



### EXHIBITS AND BOOKS

Annie, who never thought herself a writer, says her strengths lie in storytelling. "My granddaddy had a big farm back in our early days, and sometimes we young girls got to work in his fields, too. Children nowadays do not know anything about farm life." Annie considered sharing how she and her sister visited their grandparents might make for a good children's book. "I penned the first sentence after thinking about it for three to four years. Its title is *Georgia Farm Life in the 1940s*." Her second book is autobiographical—*What Color is Water? Growing Up Black in the Segregated South*."

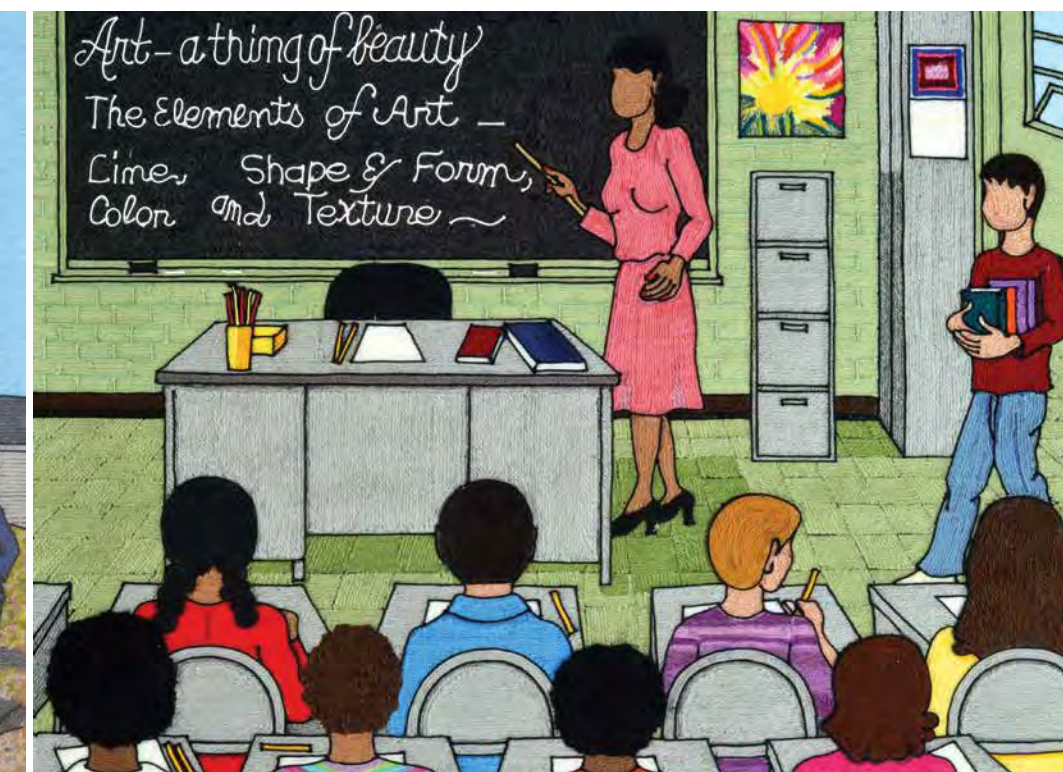
Annie's yarn art exhibits associated with her books are created from her farm and city life experiences and segregation memories. Her exhibit at McIntosh Art Association next month will include dozens of yarn art pieces, depicting times gone by. When asked what she hopes people understand about her art she said, "That this was a period in life we don't ever want to repeat again. I wish for all of us to come together and see people for who they are and not for the color of their skin. We went through some horrible times. I got cussed out sometimes when trying to use the restrooms at service stations back then. I would like for people to be more "live and let live." We need to learn to appreciate and see what each other has to offer. We can learn to help each other."

### MORE ABOUT ANNIE:

More family educators: Oliver Jr., is associate professor of music at Georgia State and a classically trained vocal performer. Their Daughter Zinta La Recia Greene Perkins has her master's in Art Education and works in Cobb County. Their granddaughter has degrees in dance and public administration from Kennesaw State, and the couple's 'sous chef' grandson graduated culinary school from Johnson and Wales University.

**FOUR FAVORITE COLORS:** "I love aqua, red. I love the presence of red in my art, but not too strong, it brings other colors out. Black is a favorite, and green because I do a lot of leaves. These four colors make things bright."

**FEBRUARY 7 & 8:** *The Black History Art and Humanities Program presents America's History at the McIntosh Art Association and Archie B. Myers, Sr. Fine Arts Center - both in Darien. Feb 7: Artist's Exhibit & Reception 5 - 7 p.m. Meet Annie Lucille Greene at McIntosh Art Association and view her yarn art display featuring 33 pieces, 404 North Way. Feb 8: 1- 3 p.m. Grand opening and full program: Annie L. Greene, The McIntosh County Shouters, Prospect Baptist Church Praise Dancers, Shadrick Coleman and Jessica Myer...A Negro Mother at Archie B. Myers, Sr. Fine Arts Center at McIntosh County Academy. Call 912.437.7711 for details.*



Artist's notes: "The Carnival" (on left) We took our rightful place in-line for rides, however, there was a place for coloreds to sit in the tents for side shows.

"St. Paul AME Church" (middle)

"My Art Class" (right) is a favorite memory. Along with school desegregation, many other things started to change.