



- VAIL DAILY**
- News
- Sports
- Classifieds
- Service Directory
- Real Estate
- Arts & Entertainment
- Business
- Columnists
- Commentary
- Blog
- Education
- Town Talk
- Events Calendar
- Letters to the Editor
- Autos
- Obituaries
- Our World
- Photo Galleries
- Special Sections
- SERVICES**
- Submit News
- Archives
- Business Directory
- News Feeds
- Podcasts
- Email Headlines
- Vail Daily Store
- Email Newsletter
- Road Conditions
- Mountain Cams
- Video Headlines
- AROUND VAIL**
- Dining
- Shopping
- Spas
- Bars & Nightclubs
- Performing Arts
- Live Music
- Arts & Culture
- RECREATION**
- Ski & Snowboard
- Golf
- Fishing
- Mountain Biking
- Hiking
- Rafting & Paddling
- And More...
- TRAVEL INFO**
- Lodging
- Chart Term, Rentals

Search:

Go!

[Classifieds](#) | [Place an Ad](#)

June 26, 2007

## Artist brings new life to the dead

Minturn resident Tanya Boggs takes photos, but not with a camera

**Caramie Schnell**  
**Vail, CO, Colorado**  
 June 6, 2007

[Comments](#) [Print](#) [Email](#)

Patrick Willey saw a dead porcupine on the side of the road near Minturn. Most of us might give the fallen, bloated critter a quick second glance, maybe a grimace, and then forget about it. But Willey picked up the phone to make a call that would alter this creature's afterlife: His wife, artist Tanya Boggs, collects dead things.

### If you go ...

What: Tanya Boggs art exhibit  
 When: June 15 - 22. Artist reception is on June 15 from 5 - 8 p.m.  
 Where: Mount-N-Frame, 953 South Frontage road W. Suite 110, just west of Lionshead  
 For more information on the artist, check out [www.tanyaboggs.com](http://www.tanyaboggs.com) or call Mount-N-Frame at 476-4172.

It's not what you think, though; she's not weird, or even excessively morbid. She is interested in taking found, familiar objects and making art out of them —

essentially giving them new life. After boiling the porcupine in a thrift-store pot in her front yard, Boggs salvaged the animal's skull and spine, both of which have been incorporated into her unique photographs.

"We cook turkeys in the front yard in the winter too, so having a big pot and flame, I don't think anyone really even noticed," she said.

She still has the porcupine's quills, too — "I'm not sure where I'll use them," she said.

"On the surface my art appears to be about death, but when you spend some time with it, it really has more to do with life," Boggs said.

### A study in mortality

Hanging on the wall above the couch in her Minturn home's living room are two large canvases. The surfaces are a field of black, except for a pale fish skeleton in one and a brown Finch in the other. The images are so striking and detailed they look three-dimensional.

The fish, a yellow tang, used to swim in the '80s-style television-turned-fish-tank that sits a dozen feet away. When it died, Boggs deposited the body in a glass jar and waited for it to decompose. The bird belonged to a friend, Boggs said. When the friend called her up, distraught, to tell her about the pet's death, Boggs asked her an unconventional question.

Artist Tanya Boggs holds an album showcasing a butterfly in her Minturn home. Her newest work incorporates antique photo albums. Boggs made the images of the bird and the fish skeleton using a scanner. To see the whole series, check out her website, [www.tanyaboggs.com](http://www.tanyaboggs.com).  
**Kristin Anderson/ Vail Daily**



[Click to Enlarge](#)

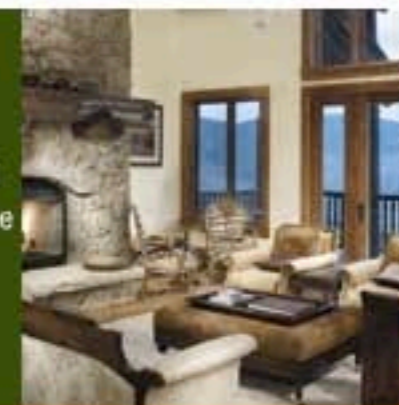
[Browse Vail Daily Photos](#)

**KELLER WILLIAMS**  
 MOUNTAIN PROPERTIES

Bart Peaslee  
 The Bartlett Group  
 970.766.7080

### Horizon Pass # 306

5B/5BA Penthouse  
 Exquisite blend of architectural details, accessories and antique furnishings. 3,916 sq. ft.  
 \$4,900,000 Furnished



Bachelor

Beaver

Vail

Gulch

Creek

Lionshead

Get Arts and Entertainment Feeds [XML](#) [+ MY YAHOO!](#)

**TRAVEL INFO**

Lodging

Short Term Rentals

Transportation

Weather

Road Conditions

Maps

**MOUNTAIN LIVING**

Real Estate

Wedding Ideas

Community

Gardening

**NEWSPAPERS**

Aspen Times

Citizen Telegram

Grand Junction Free

Press

Eagle Valley

Enterprise

Leadville Chronicle

Post Independent

Snowmass Sun

Summit Daily

The Vail Trail

Valley Journal

away. When it died, Boggs deposited the body in a glass jar and waited for it to decompose. The bird belonged to a friend, Boggs said. When the friend called her up, distraught, to tell her about the pet's death, Boggs asked her an unconventional question.

"I said, 'Can I have it?'"

For about a year now Boggs, formerly a traditional photographer, has been using her scanner as a camera. The fish and the bird a part of a series called 'Re: Incarnation.' Last month, Boggs graduated with a Masters in Fine Arts from San Francisco Art Institute; for the past four years Boggs has spent her summer months in San Francisco working towards the degree. The low residency program demands intense study for a few months and minimal study (3 credits) throughout the rest of the year.

Her MFA final exhibit in San Francisco was successful by any recent graduate's standards: She sold four out of seven pieces and received almost entirely positive feedback.

Almost.

"There was one entry in the guestbook where this woman wrote, 'If you didn't kill them yourself, who are you to exploit their deaths?'"

"So it would make her feel better if they died at my hand? I didn't quite understand that," Boggs said.

"Rather than exploiting (their) death, I'm giving them new life."

**'So raw, so open'**

A few years ago Boggs' lost her brother in a car accident. She started taking long walks to cope with her intense grief.

"That about all I did, all day, was walk," she remembered.

On her walks, she'd spot things she might not have noticed before. For awhile, she picked up old, rusty railroad spikes.

Then she started spotting dead things. She was biking when she saw a dead bee in the middle of the street. She stopped, picked it up and walked her bike home, carrying the bee in the palm of her hand. Once home she put in a glass jar.

"I guess it was the act of wanting to preserve something," she said. "I was so raw, so open I didn't have the ability to judge my impulses anymore. If I had the urge, I just did it."

She amassed nearly 30 jars in her studio and when someone asked what she'd been up to, she popped a jar onto her scanner to reproduce an image rather than taking a photo.

"(The first one) was a white flower in a jar," she said. "It came up on my screen and it was just gorgeous."

Her artist statement on her Web site, [www.tanyaboggs.com](http://www.tanyaboggs.com), summarizes her focus simply:

"In the age of technology and instant gratification, this work presents a nostalgia for the old and beautiful, the mysterious and the strange. By creating a past that never really existed, 'Re: Incarnation' creates a sense of solace, giving comfort to the perpetual sense of loss felt throughout our lives."

**Confession is good for the soul**

Eventually Boggs dropped the jars, but kept scanning their contents — butterflies, bees, dried flowers.

"It just picks up these great details and has a weird three-dimensionality to it."

Friends in grad school would bring her dead bugs housed in old film containers. Her daughter, Dakotah, 10, brings her mom dead or dying butterflies she finds with her friends. The work often has a cathartic effect on viewers: Strangers, after seeing Boggs' work, will often confess their own eccentricities. Some people even want to share: One lady came up to Boggs and just to say 'I have a hummingbird in my freezer if you want it.'

The woman discovered the dead bird but didn't want to just throw it away, feeling like that would be almost sacrilegious. She thought about having it stuffed, Boggs said, but worried no one would do it. The freezer seemed like a good interim solution.

The stories, though sometimes strange, can help Boggs come to terms with the unconventional elements of her artistic process.

"It makes me feel like less of a freak," Boggs said, a smile on her face.

Caramie Schnell can be contacted at 748-2984 or [cschnell@vaildaily.com](mailto:cschnell@vaildaily.com).