

Out of Africa

RON COWAN Statesman Journal

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Redmond, Wash., artist Tereza Swanda painted "Us Them" in the wake of 9/11 in 2001, but it took a visit to South Africa in 2003 to encourage her to transform the work.

Swanda has been at the Chemeketa Community College Art Gallery during the last week to paint a new version of "Us Them" for an unusual two-gallery exhibit by 22 international artists.

"Through the Eyes of Strangers: Artists Visit South Africa" is shared between the Chemeketa Gallery and Salem Art Association's A.N. Bush Gallery at Bush Barn Art Center.

More than 100 works are divided between the two galleries, with 11 artists at each gallery. Each gallery also has two artist videos.

The only Oregon artist is Laura Mack, the Chemeketa gallery coordinator who curated the show, with artists from throughout the United States, plus artists from London; Bogota, Columbia; Florence, Italy; and Elablag, Poland. All attended workshops in South Africa over the course of the past 10 years, led by Rose Shakinovsky and Claire Gavronsky of South Africa.

"It's not a cultural tourism kind of workshop where you make pretty pictures of the bush," Mack said. "It's taking the information and filtering it and what do you do with it; how do you look at the world.

"I think the goal of a lot of this work is how do you shift that perspective with your work."

For Swanda, it was a revelation: "Us Them" was based on a famous photograph of Bloody Sunday, a 1905 incident in czarist Russia where government troops fired on demonstrators.

Her original version had the two sides facing off, against a background of an ornate building.

The new version omits the building and takes on a theme of reconciliation, with the two lines of people connecting.

"South Africa as a place, to me it was a place of amazing people," she said. "So it's like the victims are now on the other side of that experience."

She visited the Robben Island prison where Nelson Mandela, activist and later president of the country, spent 27 years, discovering that her guide was a fellow prisoner of Mandela.

"He's translated this place of horror to a place where he's living with his wife," she said. "That's just incredible to me; I can figure myself out and move on."



ANDREA J. WRIGHT | STATESMAN JOURNAL

Tereza Swanda paints a piece titled "Us Them" for the "Through the Eyes of Strangers" exhibit at the Chemeketa Community College Art Gallery last week. Half of the exhibit is at Bush Barn Art Center.

'Through the Eyes of Strangers: Artists Visit South Africa'

When: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays to Fridays and noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays at Bush Barn Art Center; 10a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays to Fridays at Chemeketa Community College Art Gallery through Oct. 26

Where: Bush Barn is at 600 Mission St. SE, Salem; the Chemeketa Gallery is in Room 122, Building 3, on the Chemeketa campus at 5000 Lancaster Drive NE, Salem

Cost: Free

Call: (503) 581-2228 for Bush Barn; (503) 399-2533 for Chemeketa

Swanda, who has a second painting here -- "Open Wounds," a field of color with heads marked with red -- is trying to focus on what that experience said.

"Yes it happened, but there's a place of learning from there," she said.

Mack, whose work is at Bush Barn, visited the District Six Museum, a memorial to a demolished district of Cape Town that fostered integrated and multicultural relations, and met a former political prisoner.

"It made me realize that history isn't just something that happens," she said. "It's people's lives, the world they live in; it's their history."

Later meeting a Holocaust survivor at the Los Angeles Museum of Tolerance, she came away with a renewed appreciation of diversity and tolerance.

Among her works at Bush Barn is one entitled "We Are All Africans."

Oakland, Calif., artist Analisa Goodin, writing the essay "On Borders" for the show catalog, addresses the issues in the exhibit at length.

"Questions of fascism, power, colonialism and oppression, which are theoretical discourses in America, are realities in South Africa," she writes. "To be there as artists, with the intent of translating our experience into the visual realm, meant that real emptying of our minds had to occur in order to let new perspectives in.

"In the letting go of ourselves is where we found ourselves again, shifted and came together."

The mixed media works in the two shows are, as a whole, subtle and understated in nature but powerful in content.

There are a variety of art forms, from paintings to cutouts, found objects, image transfers, ink, vintage photos and prints, with several works featuring silhouettes and red thread. Many of the artists are represented by series of works.

At Bush Barn, the art includes San Francisco artist Lisa Knoop's "Injury" series, a series of drawings of injured natives combined with Wille's Cigarettes cards showing bandaged people with common injuries.

"I think they're all trying to express and deal with what they saw," said gallery assistant Erin West, who was installing the show.

"They are all trying to express it in their art."

Anna Maria Arango of Bogota is represented at Bush Barn by "The Bodies Were Stacked on Each Other," a subtle but potent work with cutouts and pen and ink on paper.

Geoffrey Cunningham of Oceanside, Calif., is politically oriented at Bush Barn in his three "Paint by Numbers" paintings, entitled "Iraq," "Guantanamo Bay" and "Katrina Survivors," with the viewer left to fill in the blanks.

At the Chemeketa Gallery he and Carrie Minikel of San Francisco have a joint work called "Home in a Box," which is actually a cardboard box with the remnants of a memorial they installed on a fence for the war in Iraq.

Faded flags, name tags and heart-shaped paper memorials spill out of the box.

Goodin, in the Bush Barn show, has a similar anti-violence message in "Snug Guns," a charcoal on paper piece that is images of handguns.

Goodin, like many artists, wanted a raw look to her work, so it is unframed.

Marco Chiandetti of London simply asks for our own comments in his acrylic "Confessional Box" at Bush Barn, where we are invited to fill out a confession on a piece of paper and stuff it in a box.

Viewers at both shows are invited to open their hearts visually to the artists' experience.

"What could I do to help?," writes Brooklyn artist Holly Brooks. "I open my heart."

Mack was struck by how the artists were all emotionally at the same place.

"It's weird how I see the connection, the more I stand in this room and look at this work," she said at Chemeketa.

The artists at Chemeketa are Tereza Swanda, Holly Brooks, Analisa Goodin, Michael Maline (New York); Melissa Morris (Florence, Italy); Carla Repice (Union City, N.J.); Zachariah Rockhill (Brooklyn, N.Y.); Tessa Sutton (Des Moines, Iowa); Camille van de Velde (London); and Angela Rose Voulgarelis Illgen (Woodside, N.Y.).

The Bush Barn artists are Ana Maria Arango; Georgia Carbone (Chicago); Marco Chiandetti; Geoffrey Cunningham; Tanya Hastings Gill (Chicago); Analisa Goodin; Lisa Knoop; Laura Mack; Caroline Maxwell (Pasadena, Calif.); Sarah McDowell (Chapel Hill, N.C.); Carrie Minikel; Dorota Mytych (Elablag, Poland); Carla Repice (Union City, N.J.); and Katie Roberts (Napa, Calif.).

The catalog, available at both galleries, is \$15, with proceeds supporting the Chemeketa gallery.

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