

Opening of ALFA Guild's 2009 gallery starts with "Ghost Trees"

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Arrow Lakes News

ALFA Guild opened their 2009 Gallery season with a pair of diverse, unique, and thought provoking exhibits. Barbara Mayes, an award winning artist who began her career in the media of painting, studied at University of Colorado and Colorado State, completed her degree at University of Calgary, and has taught and exhibited in North America and internationally. Her work, she says, has been profoundly influenced by her travels to Germany and Israel, and by her own personal experience.

"Trees are poems that earth writes upon the sky. We fell them down and turn them into paper, That we might record our emptiness." - Kahlil Gibran

Barbara Maye is a brave woman. Her "Ghost Trees" exhibit is at first glance, simplistic. It is tactile and interactive, inviting viewers to touch and rearrange and manipulate the components to work for the individual. Yet through her subtle, persuasive



KEITH POWELL / ARROW LAKES NEWS

Barbara Maye, an artist from Calgary, gives an interesting twist on telling the stories of trees. Above, she holds one of her displays of long, narrow notepads made of wood.

fectively establishes the substance of her theme.

Adroitly avoiding the condescending and somewhat ridiculous label of "tree hugger," Maye introduces a perspective which is at once scientific and artistic, objective and introspective. She has done her research, and applies it to her art in a fascinating manner. One can view it as a botanical study, with references to the influ-

ence upon human civilization (the encyclopedia pages within the crosscut tree sections); or can take it more philosophically: there are parallels, maintains Maye, in the trees' experience and in human experience. They, as we, show the scars of life. In trees, there is evidence of disease, of drought, of fire and flood, infestations by insect or parasitic scourges, of foreign objects, and

of old age.

It is no accident, believes Maye, that many cultures, both past and present, believe in arboreal deities and tree spirits, and/or worship trees for their protective and healing powers, shelter and food provision. "By investigating one tree species at a time, through historical, cultural, scientific and spiritual perspectives, I create instal-

lations that encourage my audience to see a fresh perspective of individual tree species and their relationship to humans. The viewer is invited to interact in some physical way (touch, kneel close, cast a shadow, alter the presented form) to make contact with deeper meanings and connections that are not at first visible."

Maye's current body of work explores the language of trees, their historical record in comparison to ours, and the beauty, variety and intensity of the inner growth cycles. "I see a correlation in the stages of life. Trees, too, have a childhood, an adolescence, a maturity and old age."

Maye's goals are to raise awareness of the issuers that her art addresses, such as recycling with the majority of her materials being reclaimed wood and paper expressing the beauty and functionality of converting scrap into art. She also tries to relay the specific message that each tree species reveals. The elm, for example, she says, has a powerful life-force regarded in cultures, ancient and modern, as highly communicative and symbolic, frequently the gathering place or forum for the community.

A mixed media presentation of wood, paper, photography, and clay,

Maye's installation is not one to be breezed through in five minutes. The very exhibits demand a moments quiet; a certain concentration. For while the superficial presentation is quite interesting and imaginative, it could be explained by a competent botanist and filed, for most of us, under "interesting but useless information." Maye introduces an element of reverence that cannot quite be ignored. There is indeed a subliminal influence that defies definition - and it is tangible. One couple who glanced in to the gallery commented, "What the ___," and left. They returned a while later, because, "There was just something about it. Kind of weird, but compelling. Maybe it wasn't fair to walk out without seeing what it is." They stayed for nearly an hour, much of it spent contemplating "Prayers," an exhibit which is comprised of wood taken from site dumpsters, split, the nails removed, and assembled as an altar; and "Freiheit," a paper mold suggesting a dinner place setting. Extraordinarily complex, the exhibit juxtaposes construction/destruction, fragility/stability, and the artist uses a DaVinci technique of left-handed reverse writing which can be discerned only by using your shadow or decipher the text. "It is

emotional," is all the artist will divulge.

Maye quotes the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh: "the forests are our lungs outside our bodies." Without them, she indicates, we will not survive. If we see trees as our mirror and look more closely into them, "recognize the beauty, the language, and the ability to change that is offered, perhaps we will understand ourselves better and our perception of the tree as simply decorative or only as a commodity will be altered."

Do view the exhibit using the artist's guide, "Ghost Trees," which is prominently displayed at the gallery. The explanations are quite explicit, and essential to understanding the various presentations, which, though part of the whole, stand as highly individual. And don't be afraid to touch!

Next on display is a breathtaking collection from Nakusp Elementary School. Here, blindsided by a young man who is likely destined to be the Socrates of his generation, I relinquish the superficial copy I had composed which failed to convey the respect to which this exhibit is entitled. "Honest, refreshing, surprising complexity of subjects and techniques ..." There are phenomenal specimens of mixed media, collage, pencil sketches, self portraits, Picasso inspired

works, fabric art, clay, metal sculpture, pysanky (on ostrich eggs, no less) ... Never mind. Go see it. My young mentor informed me that "Kids are natural artists. We're not scared of what people think. And besides, they wouldn't dare say they don't like it, 'cause they might damage our self-esteem." Asked what he thought about critics and reviews, the young artist replied "It's kind of silly, isn't it? Like, just because I don't like something don't mean it isn't good. We get to pick, right? But some stuff's really stupid, like hung up rabbits and things. But nothing in this show." He won't allow his name in print, not because he might get whacked on the playground, but because it's "show-offy" to get your name in the paper. He'd consider an exception if all the exhibitors were credited. Hope I'm still around when he's old enough to run for politics. In the meantime, congratulations to NES principal George Harding, teachers Chris Dixon, Brenda McQuair, Pattie Zeleznik and Heather Jenkins, and the talented students who contributed to this extraordinary show.

The exhibits are on display through June 21 at Selkirk College. Admission is by donation to ALFA Guild Gallery. The next show will feature photographer Lee Orr, opening June 24.

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2009 Operations Update in Nakusp

June 18, 2009

Nakusp Senior's Centre

210 - 8th Avenue NW, Nakusp, BC

12 noon - 2 pm

BC Hydro invites the public to a presentation and discussion on BC Hydro's operations in your community.

The agenda will include updates on recent BC Hydro initiatives, snow pack forecasts, reservoir operations and distribution operations.

We look forward to seeing you on June 18.

For more information, please contact Jen Walker-Larsen at 250 814 6645.

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