

Please touch the art

Alumna's rice-paper work wins gallery spot

By Gail Fredrickson

The rice-paper wine glass won't hold wine, but the candle-holder made of the same material sports a real candle. And remarkably, they're sitting on top of a free-standing, rice-paper table, complete with a plate and cutlery.

This delicate yet durable creation is the work of artist and recent U of C graduate, Barbara Maye, BFA'07.

The table, titled *Freiheit* (meaning "freedom" in German), along with two other pieces, *Historical* and *Memoirs*, have brought Maye national recognition. This spring, she was the third-place winner overall in a national student competition for graduating visual arts students. Last month, her pieces were installed in the St. Thomas/Elgin Public Art Gallery in St. Thomas, Ontario. Maye is the first Western Canadian artist to win this particular showing.

Maye is a research-based installation artist. "After researching my topic historically, culturally, scientifically and spiritually, I try to present an environment that makes my audience see a fresh perspective. I also like my work to invite the viewer to interact in some physical way (touching, kneeling close, casting a shadow) to discover deeper meaning that is not at first visible."

Freiheit is a collection of tiny, torn bits of paper which Maye hand-ripped and stuck together. "My materials are all scraps of tree, or reference trees, including packing paper, junk mail, photograph paper, wood from construction sites, felled trees, clay imprinted



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with tree rings, nails pulled from construction scraps," says Maye. "I always reference back to the source of the material—the living tree."

Maye's research is based on what she refers to as the western cultural view of trees—commodity, ornamentation and a retreat from "real" life.

"All cultures at one point in the past believed in deities, tree spirits and they worshipped the trees for their protection, healing powers and food provision," she says.

Maye wants her latest body of work to "raise awareness of the issues that my art addresses—recycling, historical record comparisons, historical methods of using trees to preserve written history, and the value of reclaimed wood: the beauty and functionality of changing scrap into art."

Her work will remain on display in the Ontario gallery until the end of the month.