

Times-News publishes article on Speak For The Trees

‘Ketchum art exhibit, gallery owner’s book speak for the trees’

By Karen Bossick – Times-News correspondent

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Early last spring, gallery owner Andria Friesen was driving through Ketchum and saw a bumper sticker on the back of a pick-up truck that read “Speak for the Trees.” Any Dr. Seuss reader will know that “speak for the trees” is the guiding principle of the Lorax from the 1971 children’s book of the same name.

KETCHUM — Andria Friesen was stopped at one of Ketchum’s three stoplights when the sage wisdom of the Lorax caught her eye.

“Speak for the trees,” said the bumper sticker on the car ahead.

By the time the light turned green, the gallery owner had a new calling: A 179-page book featuring 76 internationally recognized artists who have had long-standing love affairs with trees. All in the spirit of Dr. Seuss’ fable, in which a mossy creature says that he “speaks for the trees, as the trees have no tongues.”

The handsome coffee table book features tree-related artwork, the artists’ thoughts on trees and their favorite quotations about trees.

An exhibition of some of the artwork featured in the book will open with a reception from 5 to 8 p.m. Wednesday during Ketchum’s Christmas Gallery Walk, then continue through Feb. 5 at the Friesen Gallery, 320 First Ave., and the former Anne Reed Gallery across the street.

“Do you realize how big this is? We’re talking some of the most important artists working today,” Friesen said. “There’s never been anything like this in Ketchum before.”

Indeed, Friesen tabbed some major contemporary artists in her book, including Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Yoko Ono, David Hockney, Julie Hefferman and Lawrence Fodor. They use a variety of media, including borosilicate glass wood, metal foil, carved cedar, glass tile, oil on canvas, thread, bronze, watercolor, light-jet prints, hand-blown glass and gold leaf. The images include a photograph of a sea of firs, a human form constructed from leaves and twigs, a pile of slash and resin trunks that hang from the ceiling.

“Trees speak of where we live, giving one a sense of place,” said artist Richard Jolley.

Nancy Azara created a piece with a discarded Christmas tree. It is, she said, a metaphor for Western culture where something admired is discarded when it is old and no longer useful.

“In altering it, it is made beautiful again,” she said.

Yoko Ono’s work “A Wish Tree” will be among those featured in the gallery.

“Make a wish. Write it down on a piece of paper. Fold it and tie it around a branch of a wish tree. Ask your friend to do the same. Keep wishing ... until the branches are covered with wishes,” she writes in Friesen’s book.

Artists reached back to Abraham Lincoln and Shakespeare, John Muir and Khalil Gibran, for evidence of our deep connection to trees.

“God is the experience of looking at a tree and saying ‘Ahh!’” writes Joseph Campbell. “The wonder is that we can see these trees and not wonder more,” writes Ralph Waldo Emerson.

A limited edition run of 3,000 books was published by Marquand Books on Forest Stewardship Council-approved paper. Friesen will donate the proceeds from the \$80 book to the Esalen Institute, an alternative educational center in Big Sur, Calif., and to Findhorn Garden, a spiritual community in the Scottish Highlands.

Both were instrumental, she says, in the book's conception and completion.

Friesen Gallery director Stacy Collins said she's amazed how each artist's vision is entirely different.

"Trees affect everyone, but in such different ways," she said.

Friesen echoed her sentiment.

"Seventy-six different works. Seventy-six completely different stories," she said. "You ask me how composing this book has changed me. Ask me a year from now; ask me five years from now. The short answer is: Forever more. The images and the quotes are powerful and inspiring. They've caught me off guard. They've changed the way I think about things."

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