

CULTURE

If sitting in the woods making art with lesbians sounds like bliss, you'll love Dyke Art Retreat Encampment from June 29 to July 6. Each summer lesbians and bi women from ages 20 to 80 gather outside Roseburg on Steppingwoods Women's Land for workshops, creative time, camping and socializing.

About 14 years ago, Jean Mountaingrove, Jemma Crae and Sierra Lonepine Briano came up with the idea for DARE as a supportive space to explore creativity. Today, Mountaingrove and Crae still coordinate the weeklong event.

They find that queer women feed each other's imagination. One year someone brought a door from home and painted a life-size Virgin of Guadeloupe. Crae says others were inspired and virgins began popping up all over in their art.

It's this kind of sharing of ideas and skills that makes DARE a special place where



Camp founders Jemma Crae (standing far right) and Jean Mountaingrove (sitting far right) lead DARE into its 14th year. Portland artist E. Ann Hinds stands far left.

They dare you

No talent for art?
The Dyke Art Retreat Encampment
doesn't care a bit.

BY KATHY BELGE

women artists return year after year. At the beginning of each session, attendees meet to plan how their week will be spent.

A typical day begins with breakfast; a cook prepares all vegetarian meals. Then campers may participate in life drawing or wander off to work on their own projects. Lunch at noon is followed by one or two workshops in the afternoon. Campers then have free time to hike around the woods, sit by the stream or take in a sauna or hot tub soak. After dinner, evening programs include watching videos about women artists, sharing slides of artwork or writing about life as an artist. The women camp on the land or stay in one of the cabins.

Attendance is limited to 15; about five return each year, and newcomers arrive every year. Many are from Oregon, but women have also come from California, Canada, Europe and Asia.

Portland artist E. Ann Hinds returns every year. "It's a very spiritual thing, and that's why it's important to me that it happen...in the trees," she says. "We're there to heal, and we're there to renew ourselves."

Martha Thomas has attended for seven years, calling DARE a place to focus on her art away from life's daily distractions and to spend time with other lesbians. "I feel like I can just be

exactly who I am," states Thomas, an occupational therapist from Portland. "Besides, I think it's just really nice for me to be around women; I tend to prefer that anyway."

Hinds echoes that sentiment. "Once we're on the land, we become the community for the week, and we hold that community inviolate," she says. "Very often the support continues off the land. People make strong relationships that continue over time."

Thomas adds: "It's really nice to talk to other people and see what their struggles are, too.... I also have learned a lot about lesbian community."

And then there's the art. "Making art with lesbians is really powerful because we don't have anybody looking over our shoulder or even our own self-critic saying that's not OK," says Crae. "We just play with each other.... You feel safe."

Hinds notes they have deliberately tried to create a culture where women will leave behind their criticism. She usually offers a workshop designed to help people get in touch with their creative spirit and let go of judgment.

Hinds loads up her car with all kinds of art supplies, and usually everything gets used. Crae holds a card-making workshop each year and teaches wire sculpting and garden art.



Lesbians find another use for duct tape when they learn to make wallets at the Dyke Art Retreat Encampment

Hinds fondly remembers one camp where someone taught basket weaving from stripping blackberry vines and brambles. "I think the most cathartic activities and the most meaningful were around art made from nature and elements we found on site," she says.

All levels of artists are welcome—from those who make their living from art to those who have never really explored their talents at all. "You don't have to be a professional artist or even do any art," Crae affirms. "Just come. If you feel like you want to express your creativity, this is a good place to do it because anything goes." ■

The 14th annual DYKE ART RETREAT ENCAMPMENT is June 29 to July 6. Cost is \$180-\$195 sliding scale. Register by June 14 at 541-679-4655 or danajem@internetcds.com.

KATHY BELGE is a Portland free-lance writer.

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