

... YOU'LL LOVE THIS HIP LITTLE
(60s POLYNESIAN-STYLE) THROWBACK
—OUT & ABOUT



KAMONI WANNALAYU

- A LITTLE RETRO
- A LITTLE NITCH
- A LITTLE EXOTIC



A TIKI RESORT •
The top tropical resort in the world
(866) HOT TIKI • INDIANOLA TIKI.COM

It's My Pleasure
Gifts for Romance in
an Elegant Setting




Corner of Sandy Blvd. & NE 64th
3106 NE 64th • Portland, OR 97213
503.280.8080

When one of a
kind is important...



503-481-1323
JimDailing@mac.com
<http://homepage.mac.com/jimdailing/>



www.pdxcgmc.org

The Portland Gay Men's Chorus

Garage Sale

Don't miss the PGMC GARAGE SALE!
It's a fundraiser for our trip to
Montreal in July.

Saturday, March 27, 2004
8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Trinity United Methodist Church
SE 39th and Steele

Imagine what you'll find when these boys "clean out their closets"!

ART

Shadows from Bosnia

Jasminka Mujcic asks what makes a city a city

BY HELEN SILVIS

Arriving in Portland as a refugee from mid-'90s war-torn Bosnia, 16-year-old Jasminka Mujcic already knew more than she needed to know about the human capacity for hate and violence. She simply wanted to be an ordinary high school student leading a safe, ordinary life.

But in the line waiting to register for Marshall High School she sensed trouble. "I saw the crowd move, and I knew something was wrong," she remembers. "Then this guy grabs another guy and throws him through the glass of the registration office. I thought: 'I'm at home. Don't worry about me. I'll fit in.'"

Mujcic laughs as she tells the story—laughs big—falling forward over her long legs and almost falling off the chair. She's sitting in Shift, a contemporary arts gallery, surrounded by her paintings of Banja Luka, the city where she lived before the war.

In acrylic and oil, the landscapes show bridges, streets and marketplaces. But something is missing from the paintings—the same something Mujcic missed when she visited in 2001. People.

"It was the first time we'd been back. My mother wanted to visit the graves of her parents," she explains. "But it was very difficult for both of us. Everything had changed. For me, emotionally, it was not the place where I grew up."

What makes a city a city? Mujcic asks, in words and in her work.

"It's probably the people who live there and the long relationships you have with people when...your family has been there. I couldn't make that connection because everyone was gone. They were either dead, left or a refugee."

At the time Mujcic couldn't completely understand her own reaction. "I thought the trip was disgusting," she admits. "It was sticky, I couldn't breathe. I didn't want to face it emotionally. But two years later, I started painting."

She calls the collection of cityscapes *Shadows*. The people she remembers may not be visible in the paintings, she says, but their spirits inhabit the scenes.

"A lot of people made my life beautiful, and I want to acknowledge them," she says. "When you disappear so abruptly I think it should be acknowledged that your life meant something."

A graduate of Pacific Northwest College of Art, Mujcic began her artistic career back in her homeland when her parents sent her to drawing lessons at 13. Then the war started, and Mujcic's family, who are Muslim, were in danger.

For two years they moved to Croatia, where the teen-ager studied under a new art teacher. "She was very strict; it was all about technique," Mujcic says. "But even though I didn't always like her lessons, I realized I would continue with art."

However, Croatia was no refuge from perse-



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Bosnian immigrant Jasminka Mujcic premieres her new painting series at Shift this month

cution. In addition to laws that penalized Bosnians and forbade them from owning property, prejudice from ordinary people made life difficult for Muslims. One of Mujcic's high school teachers began to harass her—phoning her at home and calling her a "filthy Turk."

In 1994 the family moved to Portland. "The first street I saw was 82nd Avenue," Mujcic recalls. "I couldn't believe people lived in such a place. With all those car dealerships, it looked like an industrial zone."

At Marshall High the culture shock continued. That first year two people were wounded

by a gunman in the school cafeteria. "Just my luck," she says—again with that big laugh.

And Mujcic just didn't fit in. She couldn't speak English. She didn't belong in any of the cliques. And she didn't date. That is, she didn't date until she met Sanela, another refugee from Banja Luka, who she met through her cousin.

Skipping school one day, she and her cousin were eating lunch in Lents Park when Sanela stopped by. "She leans over and says: 'So you are Jasminka,' and she gives me the look—you know the look. And that was it for me."

Fast-forward five years, and they are still a couple. Their shared history is important, Mujcic says. "We're completely different, but we have this common understanding. All the demons you have—this way you don't have to explain them." ■

JASMINKA MUJIC's *Shadows* is on view through March 30 at Shift, 625 N.W. Everett #101.

HELEN SILVIS is a Portland free-lance writer.



Spirits inhabit the seemingly empty landscapes of *Shadows*