

ART

# Open your eyes

Lesbians invite art lovers to visit their studios

BY MEG DALY

If you ask Inanna McGraw about her painting "Three Cats and Two Dragons," she will likely ask you to explain it to her.

"I like to hear people's interpretations of my paintings," says the 60-year-old. She has been making art since the 1970s. Normally a figurative painter, McGraw recently took a departure from recognizable forms to create "Three Cats" and other abstract paintings for a series she calls *The Love Files*.

"I had just finished a large series of large mythological figures, and I was tired of having to subordinate color and design to be recognizable in some way," says McGraw.

So she let herself play with color, which is "the point of it all for me," she says. "I use color for its emotional value."

McGraw is one of 94 artists selected to participate in this year's Portland Open Studios, a two-weekend tour of artists' work spaces. On Oct. 9, 10, 16 and 17, a bevy of local artists will welcome the public into their studios and reveal the mysteries behind art-making.

Started in 1999 by painter Kitty Wallace, Portland Open Studios offers unique access to artists at work—from sculptors to painters to glass blowers and more. Tourgoers purchase a \$12 pass that is good for two adults and includes a tour guide and map of the studios.

McGraw, who has participated in Open Studios for the past three years, adds, "People seem quite fascinated seeing an artist doing what they do." Visitors will see her works in progress in a series of paintings of Irish musicians.

McGraw says the tour is "a way to make friends for your work and your art." Also, she wants to help demystify artists and art-making to the general public. "I feel like art has a kind of ivory tower image that isn't fair," she says.

McGraw, who calls herself a pagan, has long incorporated myth into her life and her art. "I find myth a good way to interpret and put a frame around what's happening in my own life," she says. "I see the world as everything being connected."

In addition to McGraw, at least two other lesbians will show their work in the self-guided tour. Sherry Wilmsen uses plants and plant material to create what she calls "botanical collages." Wilmsen arranges plant parts in intricate patterns, sometimes creating new plantlike structures from different stems, leaves and flowers. Laid on a plain white background, the simple, kaleidoscopic images are then scanned digitally and printed on a high-resolution inkjet printer.



Tourgoers can watch Inanna McGraw's paintings evolve during Portland Open Studios

Wilmsen says the printed images "are so detailed, with such depth and accuracy, that people often confuse the prints with the originals." An avid gardener, the 54-year-old thinks of herself as "God's tool to make people slow down and look at these things."

For Wilmsen, the process of creating collages has been both creative and therapeutic. She developed her craft in earnest several years ago when her sister was dying of cancer. Making col-

lages became a respite from the strains of caring for her sister. After her sister passed away, Wilmsen devoted herself full time to her art.

"You could get picked off at any time," she says. "So I decided I better get down to business here."

Jen Woody, 31, is new to Open Studios. Trained as a functional potter, she has turned her attention in recent years to making figura-



tive ceramic sculptures. She molds richly pigmented clay into 15-inch people caught in the act of gesturing. Some laugh, some converse with a friend, some play music, and still other seem to sigh. The faces of her creations almost always have their eyes closed as if looking inward or listening intently.

Woody got her inspiration for the ceramic figures from years of making small "kiln gods," tiny clay creatures that potters often create to "bless" their firings. The kiln gods are placed inside the kiln and fired at the high temperatures along with the pottery.

Woody has created a series of musicians as well as "everyday folk," as she calls them, that look like people you'd meet at the corner market. She does not use models for her figures but rather relies upon her imagination and photos for reference.

When people visit Woody's studio, they tend to be curious about technical aspects of the sculptures, such as the type of clay, her tools, her firings. She says she enjoys this conversation and looks forward to having people stop by during Portland Open Studios and visit her at work. **J**



Sherry Wilmsen's "Autumn Perspective" To buy a pass to PORTLAND OPEN STUDIOS call 503-285-3131, e-mail [info@portlandopenstudios.com](mailto:info@portlandopenstudios.com) or visit [www.portlandopenstudios.com](http://www.portlandopenstudios.com).

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