

Balancing work, art: Kay Slusarenko



PHOTO COURTESY OF KAY SLUSARENKO

[above] *Balance*, a work by Slusarenko, captures 250 miniature figures struggling to stay atop a metal pipe. [left] Slusarenko's collection of magic eight balls. [below] Umbrellas double as works of art in Slusarenko's office.



ANGIE DASCHEL
A & E Editor

Walking into Kay Slusarenko's brightly painted office, I instantly felt at ease. Her collection of magic eight balls, funky umbrellas and paint-by-number canvases on the walls reflected Slusarenko not only as a collector, but also as a versatile artist who finds magic in ordinary objects.

Her love of the "mundane" things in life has led Slusarenko as an artist for thirty years. Tomorrow, she will share some of her history as a professional artist at a colloquium in M206 from 12-1 p.m.

As associate dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, Slusarenko is in and out of meetings every day, but her passion for art has stayed constant in her life. Her career in the art field is not restricted to one medium, as I soon found out. Slusarenko dabbles in painting, drawing, photography and sculpture, as well as a concept known as installation art, which she has been focused on for the last ten years.

"A gallery or museum will contact me and say 'we'll give you this room [for installation art]," said Slusarenko. "I'll go in, I'll make two rooms, maybe three rooms; I'm in-

terested in how I can control how you come into the space, and how you go out."

Installation art, according to Slusarenko, is hard to describe because it could mean so many things depending on the artist.

"I wish I could just say, 'well I just love to paint flowers,' but it's not that simple," joked Slusarenko. After showing me pictures of her installation art shows, I can see why the concept is so abstract. The only thing that seems to remain consistent in installation art is that nothing remains consistent.

"I like it being temporary," said Slusarenko. "It's very much like life, in that it is temporary. It's very much like when I walk home tonight, and maybe find a leaf and just think it's amazing, but it won't be there tomorrow."

Slusarenko has been commissioned to create her art for many places around the country, including Alaska, California, Washington and many locations in Oregon. A show at Pioneer Courthouse Square in 1994,

called "Flowerbeds," was a big success, and a joy for Slusarenko.

"I was given 29,000 flowers, and then was told to create art with those flowers," said Slusarenko. Among her work was "Hollywood Bed," a giant flowerbed modeled after an actual bed used for sleeping, complete with neon lights and an 18'x18' flowerquilt. Another was "Waterbed," a shower-like sculpture that contained working faucets, lily pads and live fish. All of the pieces were torn down after eight or nine days, leaving Slusarenko with only a memory, which she cherishes.



Slusarenko was also commissioned for work at the new library in downtown Portland. This time, the work was permanent. After requesting a space in the children's section, Slusarenko began a two-year journey into the land of miniatures.

In "Peekaboo,"

Slusarenko created eleven tiny scenes inside an oak cabinet that can only be seen from

four-inch square windows.

"I worked with an East German company that does miniature people that are *beyond cool*," marveled Slusarenko. "I can't imagine how they do it because they are only a quarter-of-an-inch to an inch tall." When she wanted to cut back on costs, Slusarenko had to learn how to paint the miniature objects herself, using only one or two-hair brushes and magnifying glasses. The piece is also lit using fiber optics, which made the scenes glow.

"I wanted something that specifically spoke to children, said Slusarenko. "Everything is out of scale and it's a real fantasy. It was a lot of fun for me."

I was absolutely captivated not only by the depth of Slusarenko's artistic ability, but also by the way she keeps art accessible to the general public. An artist must have a way of reading and interpreting the people around them, and Slusarenko accomplishes that through her diverse and extremely personal work.

"You don't want to tell people what to look for in your art, but you hope they get those feelings that you did when you created it," said Slusarenko.

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