

# Artist becomes ancestors

## 'I AM MY WHITE ANCESTORS' EXHIBIT AIMS TO RAISE QUESTIONS

BY ELIZABETH KESSEL

A picture is worth a thousand words, which is exactly what Anne Mavor's artwork proves. At the Oregon City campus, located in the Niemeyer Center, students and staff can find the Alexander Gallery filled with 13 photographs of Mavor dressed as her ancestors. Her exhibit, "I Am My White Ancestors: Claiming the Legacy of Oppression," is sure to stir up conversations.

In the gallery, the large photographs of females and males hang among a photo of a modern Mavor. What was just an idea three years ago is now an exhibit for people to experience colorful pictures, with a story behind each one.

Next to each photo, observers can read about her thoughts on the character and what it was like to be them. The artwork should allow for reflection on racism—how people used to treat each other and still do.

Mavor has been an artist since she was a child. Art is what her family did. Her mother was an artist, and projects were always ongoing for their family. From painting, to writing, photography, performance and others, Mavor has tried many different styles of art over the years.

Mavor really envisioned how to be her ancestors by using the art of performance. She tried to understand the oppression they might have caused or endured. Contributing even more to her artwork, she also sewed most of the costumes herself with help here and there.

The characters didn't come out of nowhere. It took time to research each one, and to find ancestors that died close to her age. This was important to Mavor because she didn't want to pretend to be a 25-year-old. She wanted to be able to relate better to them. Plus, the older they were, the more things they had done.

Mavor explained her thought process for the project.



photo by Collin Berend

Students examine Anne Mavor's artwork in the Alexander Gallery currently displayed in the Niemeyer Center. The artwork can be viewed until October 28.

"I wanted to find out really the sources of racism that didn't come out of nowhere," she said. "It came from the centuries of people hurting each other, and so where would we get the idea that we could hurt and oppress people based on their skin color? Where would that come from?"

In order to find out, she started her research with Europe, not even knowing for sure if she had ancestors there.

Mavor found that she could relate better to the women compared to the men when she dressed up as her ancestors. It was easier for her to be the women, since most of the men had a part in oppression while they were alive. But still, she committed to posing for even the difficult photos. When posing as King Edward, she went without food and water for the entire photo shoot and even started to faint.

Mavor wanted her artwork to be displayed in an educational environment, for classes to visit so that they could

examine and think critically about the photographs. Clackamas Community College is the first to display her work.

While there is no set criteria for choosing exhibits for Alexander Gallery, the Art department does meet to decide what they would like to see each calendar year.

Kate Simmons, the Alexander Gallery director and art instructor at the college, commented about Mavor's artwork.

"In the media things can immediately be black and white per se, but what I really enjoyed learning about Anne's work is that it's not so much black and white," Simmons said, "That it also touches on the oppression aspect and how people have been put down or allowed limited resources through time in different ways. And it's really neat to hear different ancestors' perspectives in that regard."

Praises were echoed from many students who attended the artist reception on Thursday, Oct. 6.

"Her being all the same person in the costumes are really neat," said student Angela Durant.

Her friend, Aurora Varkey, nodded in agreement, and said that the pictures were awesome.

An evening reception will be held for the gallery on Thursday, Oct. 13, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. But don't fret if you can't make it. There will also be a gallery talk held on Tuesday, Oct. 25, from 7-8:30 p.m.

If you would like to know more about Mavor and her ancestors' stories, visit her website, [annemavor.com](http://annemavor.com). There, you can listen to her talk about each of the ancestors for approximately five minutes each.

With multiple opportunities to go see the exhibit, there is still a chance to find out about Mavor's ancestors, and reflect on your own. But consider Mavor's warning: "Don't get stuck in the guilt." Keeping that in mind, would you claim your heritage too?

Collin Berend contributed to this article.