



### ART CENTER GALLERY

Clatsop Community College  
1653 Jerome Ave.  
Astoria, OR 97103

PRESENTS

### THE ROSBERG SCHOOL Figures In A Landscape

January 9th — February 23rd, 2001



Andrea Kosharek Photograph

Three young artists, working out of studio space in a defunct grade school in the tiny hamlet of Rosberg, WA, exhibit their works in a collective presentation at the ART CENTER GALLERY. Kyle Mathews & Darren Orange show paintings, and Brandon Hoffman shows drawings and paintings. The exhibit also includes photographs by Andrea Kosharek documenting the artists and the area they work in and gain inspiration from. An opening reception will be held Tuesday, January 9<sup>th</sup> 2001, at 7pm with ambient music by Analog Trio - Jim Kosharek, Roger Hayes, and Bill Horist.

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I want to take the pain to heart and feel it move like possibility, the idea of change, through things seen and unseen...

Kathleen Norris

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Thomas Edison

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### A Christmas Story

By Michelle Frost

I've sold children's books for almost too many years to count on both hands, and just when things seem to be going along pretty much business-as-usual, there comes the next surprising question that catches you off your guard, and causes you to stop what you're doing to give your full concentration to this customer who stands before you talking jibberish and appearing perfectly normal.

There once happened along a guy who needed to use our public restroom. He stood at the door with the restroom key in his hand, a blue plastic toy sword with the key rubberbanded to it, curious and befuddled by the door being locked. He jiggled the doorknob half a dozen times, then knocked and paused and knocked again. He could not for the life of him understand why the door was already locked. I listened to my co-worker explain it to him in her simplest English three times, and then, with a last hard look at the man's face, she turned and walked away.

In the kids' section it's a common question to be asked the title or author of a book from long ago, from the customer's childhood. They haven't thought of it in years and now it occurs to them to pass along this story that they loved so dearly as a child. All day I rattle off titles and authors' names in response to brief, or sometimes quite lengthy and vivid, telling of stories. This is actually the fun part of selling kids' books, providing the missing puzzle piece, putting someone back in touch with a book they knew years and years ago. I watch their delighted faces as they catch the first glimpse of these long-lost books. They reach out a hand to take it from me, so excited and careful at once, nostalgia stealing them away. Watching these reunions, and recommending new titles to someone who's read everything, these are the two challenges I face each day as a children's bookseller, the two most pleasurable aspects of my job.

As you can imagine, the holidays usurp my pleasure, and selling books in the children's department becomes warfare... strategic and brutal. No time to waste, shoppers have in mind the perfect storybook gift which may or may not exist, and they come to me in all the push and shove expecting me to see that image in their mind. Aside from being crowded, bumped into by shopping bags and pushed aside by cranky toddlers, the holidays are pretty standard fare, each year predictably as rushed and short-tempered as the year preceding it.

When enough is enough, my co-workers and I find each other in the lunchroom snacking on holiday treats put out for us by management, and seeking a few short minutes of sanctuary, a safe zone from the continuous and progressively frantic stream of customers. We swap anecdotes, cracking each other up with the day's events, one-upping one another with our tales of difficult and psychotic customers, releasing some tension before heading back to the front lines.

Cashiers carry the brunt of the load, standing for hours at a time without moving other than bending at the knees to fetch a shopping bag, staring out at the endless sea of dazed faces, a steady checkout line which extends twenty feet or more before it disappears into the literature aisle. Unsmiling people mostly, shell-shocked, recounting in their minds Who and Which and How Much while they wait patiently or not. Some appear organized and bemused, a basket of selections on the floor beside them, listening to the music, watching the action, and taking it all in stride. Others, well, it's God's grand scheme to cause this tragedy in their lives, to keep them suffering in such a state of distress and despair. They don't think twice about unleashing the monster of disappointment which lives inside them. As soon as they approach the counter, the cashier is expected to hurry it up and why isn't this cheaper and don't you have another copy of this?

So, we gather in the lunchroom, eat a few cashews and goldfish crackers, have a laugh when the going gets tough to encourage each other with humor and to share the burden that customer service becomes at Christmastide.

A woman came to me the other day asking me to show her all the books I had that explain Christmas. Stepping down the ladder from overstock, I immediately took offense to her sour personality, the demanding tone and the obscurity of her question. Fortunately, my reaction to this sort of blurring-it-out is one of calm and reasonable reckoning. I lean away. I breathe. I give thanks to be me and not this woman who is unhappy and off-putting. I smile because I'm supposed to and I keep at an even pace, asking her more specifically what she had in mind? A story? For what age? I show her a generic story of the nativity. She looked at it responding, "but then he's going to ask 'what's the big deal about this ONE baby?' and I just don't want to deal with all of that..."

I stood motionless, looking more closely at her to get a better clue, and before I could stop myself the words came out, "Well, Christmas is all about the birth of Christ... it's a Christian holiday." She'd asked for a book explaining Christmas, am I crazy? Getting nowhere with her, I faded into the back of the section to regroup... not being particularly religious myself, but certainly spiritual, I felt suddenly offended. The girl who attended Lutheran Sunday School every Sunday morning for the first 15 years of her life felt red-faced angry and perturbed that this woman just wiped her muddy feet on her clean doorstep.

Funny how people touch us, for better or worse. A couple of deep breaths later, I went to her with three alternative stories about snowmen and Santa Claus. She thanked me enthusiastically. Was this the same woman who just accosted me? For the rest of the day I thought about the origins of Christmas. If it is not about the birth of Christ, than what is it about? As far as I can tell, it's the time to honor those you love, to give them something of yourself, to celebrate the world as you know it with music, food, and the company of your dearest friends. It's a season for taking stock of what you love and giving thanks and celebrating the road thus far.

Well, I love children and stories and kind-hearted people. I love helping people find something to read. I love the feel of a book on my lap and the places I can go on any evening from the chair in my livingroom; to lands far away and along ago where there lived no customers, only farmers and seamstresses, shepherds and milkmaids, in a peaceable kingdom by the Norwegian Sea...