

'LINDA JARRARD'
BY LYNDA LANKER

ALL OF OREGON

The Wayne L. Morse Courthouse opens its doors to rotating art exhibits



As cold and verboten as government buildings typically feel, it's easy to forget that they belong to us, The People — paid for with taxpayer money, and don't you forget it.

Too often these edifices are lifeless, soul-squashing, Orwellian; but it doesn't have to be that way.

Here in Eugene, U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken, with a board of art advocates, is trying to shift that perspective by transforming the blank walls of the Wayne L. Morse U.S. Courthouse into a home for art exhibits.

The courthouse hosted its first exhibit this past autumn — *Art of Survival: Enduring the Turmoil of Tule Lake*, a haunting show about a Japanese internment camp just south of the Oregon border.

Since then, Aiken and the committee have been collaborating with the federal government to make the courthouse gallery a permanent staple, complete with a cable rail system on the walls to mount work.

The inaugural exhibit with the new system in place — *All of Oregon* — opens Monday Aug. 15, featuring the work of Oregon painters Jon Jay Cruson and Lynn Isen Peterson, mixed-media artist Mike Pease, photographers Deigh Bates, Michael Thompson and Earl James and portraitist Lynda Lanker (who is also on the board).

"There's just acres of white walls in most of these buildings," says Kirsten Shende, an art consultant of 25 years who is volunteering her time to curate and hang the courthouse shows.

Buildings like the Wayne L. Morse Courthouse are begging to display art, she says, with free wall space and a built-in security

system. The courthouse even looks like an art museum with its award-winning modern steel-and-glass design reminiscent of a modern Frank Gehry creation, like the Weisman Art Museum in Minneapolis.

There's a lot of red tape to cut through, however, if you want to make a change to a federal building, Shende says. And when you do, you go through the GSA, or the General Services Administration — the government body that manages federal properties. (In fact, it was the GSA that hosted a design competition for the Eugene courthouse in 1999.)

"It took a long time for the government to get on board," Shende says, but now the system developed may become a blueprint for courthouses nationwide.

As for the exhibit, the committee chose six artists who have unique interpretations of life in Oregon. "The whole world knows we have waterfalls," Shende says. "We wanted to show other parts of Oregon."

After the closing of the Jacobs Gallery in January, Shende says the all-volunteer board wanted to provide an outlet for local and regional artists. "We're really excited about where this is headed," she says.

"The possibilities are huge," adds Lanker, who will be showing cowgirl portraits from her *Tough by Nature* exhibit.

The board invites artists, and the public, to submit ideas for future exhibits (contact Shende at kirsten@artcounselor.com).

"It's not an elitist, private board," Shende says. "This building belongs to the people of Oregon."

All of Oregon runs through November, with an opening reception TBA, at the Wayne L. Morse Courthouse, 405 E. 8th Ave. Please note that to attend an exhibit, one must bring a photo ID and go through a metal detector. Cameras are not allowed. In fact, courthouse security says, "The less you bring in the better."

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