

Art show beats weather

By Steve Tool

Wallowa County Chieftain

More than 100 people braved high winds and rain to attend the opening of the fourth annual Women's Art Show on March 4 at the Josephy Center.

The exhibition runs March 4-28.

Josephy Center executive director Cheryl Coughlan wasn't surprised at the crowd size.

"This is really the most popular event of the year for us," she said.

It is also Coughlan's favorite and she is the one who originally floated the idea. The show, which was juried by local artist and Wallowa Valley Arts Council president Shelley Curtiss, featured more than 50 works by about two dozen mostly-local artists.

"A lot of works were turned away," Coughlan said.

Many mediums of art are represented at the show including painting, drawing, photography and sculpture. Also included for the month are Tuesday brown bag talks



Steve Tool/Chieftain

Just a few of the more than 100 people who attended the opening of the fourth annual Josephy Center's Women's Art Month exhibition. The event featured the work of more than two dozen artists. It is also the center's most popular event.

focusing on women in the arts. Other features for the month include music by Janis Carper and the movie "The Suffragette."

Jennifer Connolly, art teacher at Joseph Charter School, had three pieces of work in the exhibition including an unusual woolen sculpture that could serve as a standing piece or as headwear.

"It's a felted hedgehog with natural dyes from the

cochineal bug. It's a red dye that's been used for centuries," Connolly said. She added that the hedgehog is a symbol for the coming spring.

Surprisingly, the piece was originally intended as a sculpture. It wasn't intended as a hat until Connolly brought it to school and she saw her students immediately adapted it for a hat.

"I wasn't sure if I was going to wear it, but I felt espe-



Steve Tool/Chieftain

Joseph Charter School art teacher Jennifer Hawkins-Connolly poses next to her entirely unique worsted wool sculpture, which can also serve as headwear, at the Josephy Center's Women's Art Month opening on March 4. Connolly also was co-winner of the best costume award at the event.

cially bold tonight," she said with a laugh.

Ellen Bishop's photograph "Dragons" won the Women's Juror Choice for the show. The People's Choice will be awarded at the end of the exhibit.

SALMON

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According to tribal estimates, the number of coho that used to return to the Grande Ronde exceeded 20,000 adults in the late 1800s. Most of those fish would migrate into the Lostine and Wallowa rivers, but by the 1980s a combination of factors drove the local population to extinction. Those factors included overfishing, changes in the habitat and introduction of hydro dams on the main stem of the Columbia and Snake rivers.

Becky Johnson, who oversees tribal hatcheries for the Nez Perce fisheries department, said they received funding from the Bonneville Power Administration in 1988 to study how they could reintro-

duce coho to the basin.

"Now, we're in the process of putting fish back to where they used to be," Johnson said.

Once the adults return, Johnson said they will collect some to use as broodstock to raise future generations of hatchery-reared coho. Some may return to spawn naturally in the river.

The tribe, which co-manages the fishery with ODFW, first broached the subject in 1996. But Bruce Eddy, East Region manager for ODFW, said the agency was simply too overwhelmed trying to preserve chinook salmon and steelhead, which had been listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Thursday's reintroduction of coho is not only a huge accomplishment in its own right, Eddy said, but goes to show how far fish conservation has

come in recent decades.

"We're finally getting our head above water," Eddy said. "It's nice to be able to spend time on something other than chinook and summer steelhead."

Bringing coho back to the Grande Ronde is just the latest in a series of projects carried out by Northwest tribes across the Columbia Basin. The Nez Perce also maintains a coho program on the Clearwater River in Idaho, while the Yakama Nation is working to restore the species on the upper Columbia.

Both programs have successfully rebuilt naturally spawning coho populations, which is what Johnson said they ultimately hope to do on the Lostine.

Aaron Penney, hatchery complex manager for the Nez Perce on the Clearwater River,

said he joined the program as a college intern to help restore lost fisheries. Fishing is a big part of the Nez Perce culture, he said, and ties them to the land.

"Over the past 100 years, we've seen places like the Lostine where the populations have declined or gone extinct," Penney said. "It's like losing part of your soul."

Chuck Axtell, a tribal elder and member of the Seven Drums religion, led a series of prayers and songs to bless the fish on their way to the ocean and back. As an elder, he said it is a blessing to see those fish come back.

"The animals, they are us. They are our people," Axtell said. "We take care of each other."

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COLLETT

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"She was a beautiful charcoal artist. I always enjoyed her art work. I always look at it, it's all over our house. She started doing jewelry. We used to do our shows together, but it was pretty obvious I wasn't selling anything, or not that much, and she was doing better with her jewelry. She'd worked for me for about five years when I painted full-time after we sold the cabins, and I owed her time, so that's when I went to work at the hospital as a CNA to help support her."

Rather than feeling like competitors, Collett and his wife supported and helped one another with their artistic efforts. One of the things Collett misses is having Sue's appraisals of his work. "She was honest if she saw problems, and she would have me do the same thing. We trusted each other and respected each other's abilities. It was a real important interaction that we had ... you can get too close to your creation and lose your perspective," he said.

Art philosophy

"Since I've lived in Wallowa County, my interest was to paint my environment. Seascapes are interesting, but it's not where I live. It's not always applicable, but as a general rule if you're doing something inside your environment, you have a visual connection with it. You see it every day, you interact with it at one level or another, so you bring some kind of validity," Collett said.

Although he has been painting and drawing Wallowa County for 17 years, the area still inspires him.

"I've been looking at these mountains since I've been here, painted them hundreds of times and still don't have a clear idea about them," he said. "It's a complicated form. I don't get connected that fast, it takes me awhile."

Collett personalizes his art, something one of his instructors criticized him for.

"That's just me," he said with a smile. "Sometimes people would say: 'We like your artwork, but it's too personal.' There you are, too personal to make money at art, but isn't that what you're trying to do, put your vision or stamp on it?"

Work versus art

To earn his bread, Collett works at Wallowa Memorial Hospital as a certified nursing assistant. Unlike many artists, the daily grind doesn't deter his artistic vision.

"That's what drawing does. I always take my little sketchbook," he said. Although his job doesn't include regularly



"I See You" an unusual self-portrait by local artist Sam Collett.

scheduled breaks or lunchtimes, it works out so everyone gets about an hour off per shift.

"A lot of people go into a room to sleep, but I go out to my car. I need to get out. I've drawn and painted enough over the years, that if I get a chance to sit down, I can get in that zone in about 10 minutes. I drift right into there," he said. "Especially this last year after Susan's death, it's the thing that's kept me sane. It's the only time I'm not thinking of her, the past, that sort of thing."

Other arts

Collett has experimented with other mediums.

"I love to do sculpture and water color, but I don't feel comfortable enough with my painting and drawing to focus on another medium. Those are the only deviations," he said with a laugh. "In Salt Lake I was known more as a pastelist than an oil painter. I was the top pastelist in the area."

Other arts also play a role in Collett's life. "I play guitar. Old-time Flamenco from the '50s and '60s. I played (harmonica) for about two-and-a-half years, and I've got a great blues collection and jazz collection as well as classical. The last year I've been listening to a lot of opera. It influences my art in a subtle way. It creates an ambiance, and every painting has an ambiance. The music is a part of the environment that painting's in."

Portrait work

Collett is as well-known as a portrait artist as anything. The artist always carries paper and constantly finds himself sketching portraits.

"I'm always drawn to a portrait of the model, not just the figure. If I have time, I go to the head and work my way down.

It's strong in me."

Collett has since developed confidence about his skill as a portraitist and recognizes his rare gift.

"It doesn't happen often; it's pretty rare: draw a likeness, have the painting skills and those kind of things to do portrait work, and I can do that. When I go to Portland or Seattle or someplace, I feel like I can hold my own."

Assessing his work

Collett doesn't have a particular favorite piece, although he favors his recent work.

"The new paintings are always the best whether they are or not," he said. "That just what I think." He added that he particularly enjoyed painting Gail Swart and Tom Hutchinson. The latter painting was difficult for Collett. The subject was in the hospital dying at the time and Collett procrastinated because he didn't have a clear vision for the painting. He brought some photographs of Hutchinson to the hospital and let him select what he liked, which included different aspects of different photos.

"I started it more than five times, and I couldn't get it to work. I don't force it. If it's flawed, I go back again. I finally got it right," Collett said.

The future

"I can't retire, I have a mortgage payment to make," Collett said with a laugh. Nonetheless, the future looks bright as far as Collett's artwork. The "Goodbye Old Friend" painting mentioned above and the centerpiece photo in the first installment of this feature was recently selected by the Oil Painters of America for national exhibition. The painting currently hangs in Cincinnati, Ohio.

LEGAL NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE IS GIVEN, the Board of Commissioners will be conducting a special meeting on Wednesday, March 22 2017, beginning at 6 p.m., at Cloverleaf Hall.

This meeting will be held to hear an update from the weed board and partners, to discuss noxious weeds and proposed treatment areas and approve the 2017 noxious weed list.

MEETING AND HEARINGS ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. THOSE INTERESTED IN ATTENDING ARE ENCOURAGED TO DO SO. FOR QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT THE WALLOWA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OFFICE AT 426-4543, EXT. 130.

LEGAL NOTICE

BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING

A public meeting of the Budget Committee of the Enterprise Cemetery Maintenance District, Wallowa County, State of Oregon, to discuss the budget for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018 will be held in the Thornton Conference Room, Wallowa County Courthouse in Enterprise. This meeting will take place on Wednesday, March 22, 2017 at 6:00 p.m.

LEGAL NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Board of Directors of the Wallowa Education Service District will hold their regular Board Meeting and Budget Committee Meeting on Monday, March 20 at 5:30 p.m. in the ESD Board Room. A copy of the agenda may be obtained at the Education Service District office at 107 SW First Street #105 in Enterprise.

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