

ARTS & CULTURE

Downtown sprouts a “Garden of People”

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On Tuesday, July 6, downtown Cottage Grove got a first peek at artist Uyen-thi Nguyen’s “Garden of People.”

Through windows of local businesses like Delight, the Bookmine and Buster’s Main Street Cafe, portraits of the people of Cottage Grove are on display.

After nearly a year of painting, interviewing and getting to know various people in Cottage Grove, Nguyen’s book, “Garden of People, A Portrait of Cottage Grove,” is nearly finished. The paintings in storefront windows along Main St. are glimpses of the contents of the book. A paper with a title is in each window, including a quote that encapsulates the portrait and offers an excerpt from the book.

Because of Nguyen’s grant provided by the Lane Arts Council, she was slated to do exhibitions in Eugene and Springfield as well. Unfortunately, both of those exhibits were canceled due to COVID-19 safety concerns.

“So I decided, I wanted to do it here,” says Ngu-

yen, “I was gonna do it at the library, the Bohemia Mining Museum and stuff so I was just like, window fronts can’t close so we’re just gonna do that.”

The paintings are strategically placed in windows which get relatively little sun so they don’t fade, though Nguyen mentions that oil paints don’t suffer as greatly. The drawings she created are all in windows that won’t get sun so they can also avoid fading.

The windowfront exhibitions are meant to go through July 30 for Art Walk, where Nguyen will also be available to do pre-orders at the Opal Center.

Each painted portrait took nearly two or three weeks. Oil paint also takes a bit to dry “and some of them are big,” says Nguyen, which means they take longer to paint.

A lot of people were a bit uneasy to do portraits because of COVID-19 concerns, Nguyen recounted. To help solve this problem, she decided to meet people where they wanted.

“When I talked to them I wanted them to pick somewhere they were comfortable, so they were in their element,” says Nguyen. “Then they could



SOPHIA EDELBLUTE/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Nguyen’s paintings and sketches are on display until the Art Walk on July 30. All feature people of Cottage Grove and her book details a little bit more about each person.

tell me something about that and so sometimes I would meet people in the cemetery or sometimes I’d meet them somewhere they volunteer, sometimes it was where they worked, sometimes it was at their house... I wanted them to be in a place where they were comfortable sharing

their story.” There will be something close to 42 paintings featured in the book, which will come out sometime this summer, “maybe in August” Nguyen says. It still needs some proofing and color corrections, but it can be preordered on her website. She’s also hop-

ing to be able to sell books at local bookstores and shops. Nguyen is eager to see the books in the hands of the people of Cottage Grove.

“Hopefully people will get something out of it,” she says, noting that people shared some really

personal and important things for the book. “Getting a chance to talk to them about things that matter to them was really cool.”

To preorder her book, “Garden of People, A Portrait of Cottage Grove,” go to Nguyen’s Kickstarter page under the same title.

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