

Art Exhibition Combines Nature and Self-Discovery

By Kassidy Woytek



The artwork presented in the 'Confluence of Earth and Mind' exhibition is by Sharon Kopriva and Sherry Owens. The free exhibition is open until Feb. 26, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays and 1 to 4 p.m. Sundays at the Martin Museum of Art. Photo credit: Liesje Powers

The "Confluence of Earth and Mind" exhibition has transformed the Martin Museum of Art into an enchanted forest showcasing the works of Texas artists Sharon Kopriva and Sherry Owens. Kopriva and Owens are longtime friends who worked independently on their collections but realized that their work expressed similar themes. Both artists express deeper truths about humanity and spirituality by using earthy materials such as leaves, wood and rope.

"We're after some of the same ideas and feelings," Kopriva said. "Our materials are different, but sometimes our thoughts are the same."

Kopriva said her work represents a fusion of her Catholic upbringing and the appreciation for nature she learned in the woods of Idaho, where she frequently

spends her summers. Her painting “Cathedral Green,” which occupies an entire wall on its own, shows the outline of a cathedral against a backdrop of foliage.

“I ended up really finding my religion in the woods of Idaho, and ‘Cathedral Green’ represents that for me,” Kopriva said. “I discovered I could talk to God in the woods instead of a church.”

Hanging from the back of the exhibit are five vaguely human-shaped rope sculptures. Kopriva affectionately refers to these sculptures as “tuber forms,” describing them as “half-human, half-vegetable.”

Kopriva said these sculptures were inspired by the muses from Greek mythology who inspired excellence in poetry, music, theater and other fine arts. Upon realizing that no muse existed specifically for the visual arts, she decided to create her own version of the muses.

“I have a bonfire in the middle filled with all the materials that painters, sculptors and writers use,” Kopriva said. “That piece is about inspiring artists.”

Martin Museum of Art Director Allison Syltie said visitors who look closely can see each of Kopriva’s muses holding the tools of their trade, such as a harp or a paintbrush. Syltie also commented on the level of detail in the presentation of Kopriva’s pieces, pointing out the scattering of leaves on the floor underneath each piece.

“We had to make sure to tell the cleaning staff not to sweep those up,” Syltie said, laughing.

Sherry Owens, the second artist featured in the “Confluence of Earth and Mind” exhibit, uses crepe myrtle wood to create forms reminiscent of birds’ nests. Owens says one of these sculptures is her self-portrait, although the only recognizably human shape is the bronze pair of feet at the bottom. Syltie said one of Owens’

pieces has gained a considerable amount of attention from museum visitors because it incorporates Owens' own hair. For over a year, Owens gathered the hair from her comb and tagged it with the day's date, saving it for use in this piece.

Syltie said that the American poet Ellen Kort was so moved by this piece that she wrote a poem titled, "To the Woman Who Collected Strands of Hair," which now hangs alongside Owens' work.

"She was pleased that her hair had made itself a shawl, a murmuring song to fill the dark seams of night," the poem reads.

Another of Owens' sculptures features an actual fragment of the Berlin wall. Syltie said the branches beneath the fragment represent the tunnels used by those trying to cross to the other side of the wall. "Her work is normally not that narrative, but this is an exception," Syltie said.