FireHouse Gallery exhibit celebrates Oregon’s sesquicentennial

In celebration of Oregon’s 150th anniversary or “sesquicentennial,” the Rogue Community College FireHouse Gallery will host an exhibit featuring a statewide collaboration of Oregon artists and writers and their contemporary interpretations of Oregon’s past. The exhibit runs May 20 and through June 27.

“Perceptions of the Past” will bring the work of writers and artists from throughout the state into southern Oregon, providing visitors the opportunity to encounter interpretations of Oregon’s past in a contemporary cultural format that crosses artistic disciplines and initiates an active dialog between artists, writers, historians and the public through receptions, talks and performances.

Using the collections of the Josephine County Historical Society as a resource, 13 images from Oregon’s past (pioneer families, mining claims, Native Americans, etc.) have been selected as the core around which the show will be built. Thirteen professional writers from throughout the state each received a copy of one historic photograph and were asked to write a subjective description of the image: a poem, short story, or other literary form. Participating writers were Walt Curtis, Carlos Reyes, Lawson Inada, Kim Stafford, Vern Rutsala, David Snell, Floyd Skloot, F.A. Nettelbeck, Monica Drake, Marc Acito, Robert McDowell, Lauren Kessler and Alison Clement.

In the final step, a copy of one of the written works was sent to each of 13 professional Oregon artists who then created a two-dimensional piece of artwork based solely on the written description from the writer; they never saw the original photo. Participating artists are Melinda Thorsnes, Phyllis Yes, Royal Nebeker, J.S. Bird, Frederick James, Bruce Bayard, Judy Hoiness, Annette Gurdjian, Sherrie Wolf, Ruth Armitage, Kirk Lybecker, Ellen Dittebrandt and Lorna Nakell.

The “Perceptions of the Past” exhibit comprises a framed enlargement of each historical photograph matched with a framed and signed version of its written description and the visual artist’s interpretation.

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The exhibit is sponsored by Home Valley Bank, the Oregon Arts Commission, Josephine County Cultural Coalition, the Autzen Foundation, and Fiberoptic Lighting, Inc. It is presented in collaboration with the Josephine County Historical Society and the Grants Pass Visitors and Convention Bureau.

When the FireHouse Gallery exhibit ends, the 13 photographs, writings, and giclée prints will rotate between four locations in Grants Pass. At the end of September, the exhibit will travel to Oregon state universities. At the conclusion of the sesquicentennial year, the giclée prints, writings and photo reproductions will be added to RCC’s permanent art collection.

For more information about the exhibit, please call the RCC Galleries at 956-7339.

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