

The calm within the storm

GOVERNOR'S ART EXHIBIT BRINGS PEACE TO THE CAPITOL

By Will Carpenter
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

For three more weeks, the Wyoming State Capitol will be a scene of controlled chaos as the 2022 legislative budget session charges on. Meanwhile, something tranquil is taking place amid the high tensions.

The 2022 Governor's Capitol Art Exhibition opened simultaneously with the meeting of the Legislature. The wide range of Wyoming artists featured cover the walls in color and abstract interpretation that is rarely found in the Capitol.

The exhibition is held every two years, coordinated by the Wyoming State Museum, this time with a high concentration of local artists.

Kevin Ramler, director of the Wyoming State Museum, has overseen the show for the past six years, curating the exhibits and working with jurors. Rotating jurors each year leads to a different collection of art, sometimes more abstract and human focused, other times more natural.

"Our goal is to have a really good representation of different types of work that's being made in the state," Ramler said in a recent telephone interview. "I think if you look at the show, you'll see a lot of the things that people might typically think of with Wyoming. The landscapes, the wildlife ranch culture. But then there's also abstract work and fiber work, quilts and lots of photography."

In total, 357 pieces were submitted from 134 artists, with juror Wade Patton selecting the winners. The result is a mix of every medium. The only limitation had to do with the size of the paintings.

The timing is perfect, too. This is only the second year that the exhibit has been held at the all new Capitol Extension. That allowed Patton to select more paintings than if it were held in the much tighter space of the State Museum that was used in years past.

Having the show in the state Capitol fulfills the ultimate purpose of the State Museum's offsite art installations.

"It's a cool opportunity, especially with it being up during the legislative session, for the citizens of Wyoming to come and see the work of government and see the work of artists here at the same time," Ramler said.

Cheyenne artist Naig

This installment is uncharacteristically filled with the work of southeast Wyoming artists. The majority of them hail from Laramie this year, and eight are from Cheyenne. Together, they dwarf the other regions in the 66-works show.

Having local artists in the show



Local artist Philippa Lack poses in her home studio on Friday. Her textile "Canyon II" is featured in the Governor's Capitol Art Exhibit through May 28. Michael Smith/For the Wyoming Tribune Eagle

If you go

What: Governor's Capitol Art Exhibition
When: Through Aug. 14, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.
Where: Wyoming State Capitol basement extension, 200 W. 24th St.
Cost: Free
Phone: 307-777-7220

shines as a particular source of pride. Those representing Cheyenne are Georgia Rowswell, Donald Hendricksen, Sara Wilson, Barbara Wolf, Cerrina Smith, Terry Kreuzer, Philippa Lack and Anna Naig.

Possibly the most abstract piece in the show happens to be from Naig, a relatively new Cheyenne artist.

Her work, titled "The Cultivator," is the product of a dream, envisioned in that terminal space between rest and reality. It was lithographed within the past three months, inspired by crude cave paintings and shared human experiences.

Here's her thing – the piece was developed through metaphysical connection.

"My past work was very representational, very much humanist, and I liked connecting with people,

trying to connect with people through past experiences or by rendering people," Naig said in an interview. "But I was really intrigued with the idea of how we're all connected on an unconscious level."

Naig, who spent years as a surgeon in the U.S. Army, turned to the study of collective consciousness to create her most recent catalog of work. The idea started after she studied the writings of psychologist Carl Jung, who pioneered the analysis of dreams.

She also studied Joseph Campbell, who wrote on the subject of comparative mythology and religion. No impact was more influential, however, than using her experiences of returning from deployment overseas.

Before then, it was a hobby. She was painting landscapes and natural figures, but turned to creating something new and cathartic. Naig channeled the pain that comes from the three-month mark after returning home from a deployment.

"I find this much more exciting. It's liberating," Naig said. "I feel like it's really coming from me, and I like that it's not just looking at something and copying. It's actually part of me, and I really think that the thought of me connecting with someone else would be my ultimate goal."

Philippa Lack

Art can come from indescribable places and be expressed in countless ways.

For Philippa Lack, it's about adding some color to the world.

She does so with large, stitched textiles that go through a good deal of transformation to achieve their look. Lack first paints a picture on silk, then photographs it. She applies different software filters to alter the image to her liking by mixing, enhancing and twisting colors into something new.

Then she sends it off to Spoonflower, a digital print company, which returns the photo on a large fabric sheet. Lack begins a two-needle stitching technique and embroiders different patterns and textures, sometimes adding in padding, or frills that elevate the design into three dimensions.

After being digitally altered, the images are a mix of color that can be interpreted and reinterpreted.

There's no use in trying to figure out Lack's inspiration.

"Then comes the big question, 'What inspired me?'" Lack said recently, laughing while showing her work. "I don't know. I just look at something, and I think it would look nice in this filter. And if it doesn't look good, I delete it and do something else."

This is how Lack goes about her work. She wants it to be fun, and she wants it to be colorful. Since she was little and learned how to embroider in an art class in Jamaica, she has pushed for her work to be, above anything else, something she wants to look at.

Whenever the Governor's Capitol Art Exhibit comes back around, she submits a piece. In years past, she was never selected. This time, "Canyon II" made the cut as one of the three textile pieces in the exhibit.

That's surprising, considering Lack has seen how Wyoming favors wildlife and nature art. But her work has no buffalos, no elk and only sometimes depicts a scene from nature.

"Why would I want a picture of a charging buffalo?" Lack said. "I mean, they give you a nightmare."

Being different doesn't scare Lack. It never has.

"We all can't be the same, so we're not supposed to be the same, no, no," Lack said. "I know I'm making very different stuff. I am not going to start making stuff like everybody else."

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