

The environment and Jewish values

Rimon artists highlight the need to care for the earth and living things

By SHARON ZWEIGBAUM

Ethereal tree images, an insect lineup and a symbol-laden shadowbox are award-winning creations that can be seen in *A Delicate Balance: The Environment, Sustainability and an Artist's Voice*, sponsored by Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council, an initiative of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation.

The works, selected by curator Roslye Ultan, will be displayed and discussed at a Rimon Artist Salon on May 18 at Traffic Zone Center for Visual Arts. They will also be featured in an art exhibition at the Living Green Expo on May 5 and 6 at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds.

ART MAVEN



Using diverse means, three artists — Ann Ginsburgh Hofkin, photography; Lynda Monick-Isenberg, drawing; and David Feinberg, mixed media — have generated *midrash* (a commentary) about caring for the earth and living things, a core Jewish value found in sacred texts such as Genesis, Ecclesiastes and Deuteronomy.

Hofkin's photographs portray botanical close-ups and a sense of infinite space beyond. She applies light to magical effect, a marker for her internationally known black and

white photographs on nature themes. Infrared film fosters a glowing aura around details like gnarled limbs, luxuriant glades and rolling terrain.

The photograph "Kauai" features a low-hanging, light-infused leaf canopy, shielding a shadowy passage. In contrast, "Chicago" emphasizes a tree's anthropomorphic branches, both thick and thin, which curve against a boundless firmament. In an exhibition statement Hofkin said, "My photographs of trees, with attention to their roots and branches, emphasize the tension between stability and struggle."

The photographer explains that her unique light impressions are due to "infrared's additional sensitivity to that part of the light spectrum otherwise unavailable to the human eye." She concluded, "Evidence of things unseen but nonetheless intuited mirrors the fragility of our environment."

Vulnerability of living species is also evident in "Shmita," a tenderly drawn composition by Monick-Isenberg, a professor at the College of Visual Arts in St. Paul. Her meticulous works are based on close observation of nature, as in this gouache and graphite rendering of natural specimens, no longer alive.

A lineup of seven assorted insects tops a centered image of a shriveled dandelion plant that hovers over a dead wasp and a single feather. An observer wonders what killed them. Step back a bit and notice that the arrangement may signify a menorah.

"Viewing found objects as... metaphors and experiencing the objects through drawing, I uncover personal and universal truths," Monick-Isenberg declared. "All are reflections on how humans affect our environment

and raise questions of... personal responsibility and the Torah's teaching that we are to be stewards of the earth."

Monick-Isenberg also raises questions about plants that are genetically engineered, and the long-term effects of pesticides.

Artist and activist Feinberg takes personal responsibility on a different tangent, yet relates to the ethics expressed by Hofkin and Monick-Isenberg. In "Children of Survivors: Bosnia, Holocaust (Greece and Lithuania) and Sudan," a wooden enclosure with red and black accents and nostalgic elements, Feinberg intimates that the complacency allowing for genocide also fosters devastation of our natural surroundings.

The 3D construction with partitioned sections is loaded with concrete symbols that stress the role of memory in the sustainability of humanity. Actual items like a locket, mirror shards, a beaded necklace, Plexiglas strips and plastic toy figures are mounted against screened images of a Princess phone, eyeglasses and storm troopers.

A viewer may imagine narratives about individuals once associated with the objects. Moving from side to side in "reading" this work creates ever-changing mirrored reflections, including perceiving oneself as part of the whole.

"Children of Survivors" is the most recent from Feinberg's Voice to Vision project, which facilitates creative collaborations with genocide survivors and their descendants. Feinberg

constructed this mixed-media piece with Daliya Jokondo, Laura Zelle, Joanna Sussman and Dragana Vidovic, a group of individuals who survived or are family members of those who survived genocides in Sudan, Greece,

together concerning these topics.

Feinberg concludes, "As a metaphor, a larger issue is the genocide of our planet's environment by intentionally ignoring the consequences of global warming. Problems and solutions in both [genocide and natural devastation] are similar."

Whether or not you believe that art can help save the world, Rimon's featured artists remind us that the language of art may be the best way to make people aware of their own responsibility toward other people and toward the urgent ecological crisis.

Lynda Monick-Isenberg and David Feinberg will discuss their work with moderator Roslye Ultan at the Rimon Artist Salon, titled "A Delicate Balance: The Environment, Sustainability and an Artist's Voice," 7 p.m. Thursday, May 17 in Studio 204 at the Traffic Zone Center for Visual Art, 250 Third Ave. N., Minneapolis.

The cost is \$8; to make a reservation or view the artwork in an online gallery, go to: www.rimonmn.org. For information, contact Rimon's office at

952-381-3449.

The art will also be displayed at the Living Green Expo on May 5 and 6 at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds.

Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council is an initiative of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation.



Courtesy of Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council
"Shmita," a drawing by Lynda Monick-Isenberg based on close observation of nature, is a graphite rendering of natural specimens.

Lithuania and Bosnia.

For Feinberg, these encounters produce "memories that alter the future." He aims for "new visual ideas in order to attract and bond with people who have no personal connection to the Holocaust and other genocides." The instructor favors collaborative art to bring diverse cultures and generations

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