



ART LIBRARIES SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

36th Annual Conference Grand Hyatt, Denver, Colorado, May 1-5, 2008

Session: Women Artists of the American West

Monday, May 5, 2008 3:30–5:00 PM

Moderators: Eumie Imm-Stroukoff, Librarian and Assistant Director, Research Center, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and Marilyn Russell, Director of the Academic Support Center, Haskell Indian Nations University

Speakers:

Barbara Buhler Lynes, Curator, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and the Emily Fisher Landau Director, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Research Center
Annette Stott, Director, School of Art and Art History and Associate Professor of Art History and Women's Studies at the University of Denver
C. Maxx Stevens, Seminole/Muscogee Nations of the Oklahoma Region, Artist and Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Colorado at Boulder

Barbara Buhler Lynes' presentation: "Georgia O'Keeffe as Icon: Establishing and Shaping the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and its Collections," provided a history of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and its Research Center, and demonstrated how the museum's collections, research and exhibition programs support and further the artistic legacy of one of America's most important and best-loved artists.

Along with numerous images, Barbara Buhler Lynes provided insight into Georgia O'Keeffe, one of America's most celebrated icons, and gave additional information about the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Research Center, which opened in 1997 and 2001 respectively. Part of the presentation focused on the history of the museum, its founders Anne and John Marion, and the efforts to honor an artist's achievement by founding a museum in her name. It was mentioned that in the mid-1990s, through The Burnett Foundation, the philanthropic organization the Marions managed, that the Marions began amassing the core of the O'Keeffe Museum collection and decided to locate the institution in the artist's environment of choice, namely, Northern New Mexico. Not only had O'Keeffe chosen to work part of nearly every year in New Mexico, beginning in 1929, but she moved from New York to make the area her permanent home in 1949, three years after Stieglitz's death. Indeed, the area nourished and sustained O'Keeffe's creative efforts in a way that the East Coast had not, and she remained active as an artist until the age of 96, when failing eyesight forced her into retirement in 1984, two years before

her death in 1986. The Marions purchased a building two blocks from Santa Fe's central plaza and engaged the well-known New York architectural firm of Gluckman Mayner to transform and expand it into an elegant exhibition space of 5,000 square feet. The Marions also established the Museum in Santa Fe because it has long been the Southwest's cultural center and a major international tourist attraction, and because the city's annual flood of visitors had established something of a mandate for an institution dedicated to O'Keeffe's work. In 1997, the Museum opened, owning 116 works, 94 of which were by O'Keeffe, 33 of which had been acquired from the O'Keeffe Foundation as gifts/purchases.

The Museum was established to further the artistic legacy of O'Keeffe, and thus the focus of exhibitions and collecting programs has been primarily on her work. Because O'Keeffe has long-been celebrated as a cultural icon, she is often viewed by the public as a figure larger than life, who is lifted out of and separated from the context of her time. Were the Museum to function exclusively as a one-artist institution by exhibiting and collecting only works by O'Keeffe, it would certainly realize one of its objectives, namely to perpetuate O'Keeffe's artistic legacy. But, it would also be perceived only as a shrine, which attracts steady streams of visitors, but are more than likely not to visit the shrine again. Certainly, the museum did not want to discourage pilgrimages to the O'Keeffe Museum, but also wanted to develop programs that would encourage return visits by all audiences: national, international, regional, and local. Thus, the museum established a broad base for exhibitions, collections, and programs that include the work of O'Keeffe as well as that of her contemporaries, and took their cue from O'Keeffe and her life. That is, on the whole, O'Keeffe's work is difficult to compartmentalize stylistically; she is most often described as an "American Modernist."

A resurgence of interest in her art made O'Keeffe relevant to current and subsequent generations of artists – both men and women – whether or not they liked her work, because they realized she had established a place for women in the art world at a time when it was dominated by men, a situation that in my humble opinion has not changed much. Indeed, O'Keeffe continues to play an important role in the mind of contemporary artists. And for this reason, among others mentioned, the museum developed a comprehensive exhibition program based on O'Keeffe's art within the context of American modern art, concentrating on the art that was produced in America from the 1890s to the present. The museum always has works from the permanent collection on view. In addition, they organize or sponsor three different types of exhibitions: 1. exhibitions that shed new light on O'Keeffe's achievements; 2. exhibitions that are devoted to O'Keeffe's work along with that of her contemporaries; exhibitions of the work of O'Keeffe's contemporaries; and exhibitions of the work of living artists of distinction, especially those whose aesthetic concerns parallel those in O'Keeffe's work. And now, after being open for ten years, the museum has organized and/or hosted thirty seven exhibitions and has welcomed more than 2,000,000 visitors.

Annette Stott's presentation title was "Creative Women in the 'Old' West." This presentation included examples and images of known and unknown women who specialized in jewelry, photography, painting, quilts, and sculpture during the 19th century as well as examples of anonymous native women's arts. Images shown were examples of pioneer women's domestic art forms. Some examples were hair jewelry with an advertisement from March 12, 1873 from the *Daily Colorado Miner*; quilts of Mrs. Silas A. Strickland, "LeMoyne Star" Quilt, ca. 1880, silk and velvet, Durham Western Heritage Museum, and quilt examples from the Ladies Aid Society of the Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Omaha Commerce Quilt, 1895, and Durham Western Heritage Museum, Omaha.

Native women's art forms from past to present were shown including examples of the following: Ancestral pueblo pot, a Red Mesa pot, a Lucy Lewis pot with deer décor, 1965, an Emma Lewis Mitchell pot, 1992, a short video: "Daughters of the Anasazi" (3 minute clip), Maria Martinez, black on black pot, Pomo red feather basket, Nellie Burke Making 4-ft woven basket, 1898, Arapaho women, ca. 1900 photo, beaded and quilled dress & bag, a Shoshone dress, Teri Greeves, beaded sneakers ca. 2000 and Teri Greeves beaded sneakers from the Heard Museum.

Additional images of women painters & sculptors shown were: Grace Hudson, Love's Labors, 1898, Mrs. Jonas Brown, Mining in the Boise Basin in the early 1870's, Matilda Brown, Abby Williams Hill, Mt Rainier from Eunice Lake 1904, Basaltic Rocks 1904, Grand Canyon 1930, Minerva Teichert, Handcart Pioneers 1935, Jesus at the House of Mary and LDS church office, SLC, Martha, BYU, Alice Cooper, Sacajawea, Bronze, 1905, Portland, Oregon. Architectural images shown: Mary Colter La Fonda Hotel, Santa Fe, 1929, Lookout Studio, 1914, Grand Canyon National Park, Watchtower at Desert View, Grand Canyon National Park 1932, and a Fred Kabotie painting mural.

C. Maxx Stevens's presentation title was "Inside Out." The work of C. Maxx Stevens focuses on how she portrays herself as a Seminole Muskogee woman in today's society. Storytelling has been an essential part of her visual language as she discovers where she fits or reflects herself in the framework of the self-portrait and installations. C. Maxx Stevens discussed how the use of materials and her creative process work together with the issues that are important to her. Her images shown are as follows:

Image of Plainview - "Urban Indian" Wichita, Kansas

My work is a conceptual narration of my life: as a woman, an artist, and a Seminole / Muskogee person. In the native community the oral tradition is an important part of your learning system. As an installation artist I use installations like a visual storyteller would. Using space and materials to create my stories. Memories and knowledge is an important element to my self and my work. Due to the relocation act in 1950's many Native People were relocated to the cities to assimilate them into the general population. My parents moved to Wichita KS in an area called PlaneView which was a pan Indian community. Planeview was an abandoned WWII military housing base with many other tribal nations such as Comanche's, Cheyenne's, Choctaws,

Pawnees, Otoes, Kiowa's moving to Wichita to create a mixed Indian community.

Image: The Bell Jar Series: The Human Condition, 1994

Reflective/Reaction of how many non-natives or Native People stereotype Native Americans as people and their art work. I wanted to break it down into parts like fragments on display, preserved to be view.

Materials are important to me, they work together to convey some abstract thought. Mixed media - assemblage of materials from found to made objects. As a sculptor I use various processes in my work, such as mold making, electronics, to welding. Each stand represented a different part of the human body, the heart on the left, breath on the right. Censored to any slight air movement the light would light up. Each piece was covered with a bell jar, symbolic to how as humans beings protects or covers one self.

Image: Red Sticks; A story about survival, 1996, Mixed Media, 54"x25"

The story between the government and the indigenous people continues.

Education cuts, health and welfare cuts, job cuts, the continuance of the struggle and misunderstanding between the two. The piece was site specific to be built into a large space so it was very important how one enters the space. To control the entry of the views there were two large identical walls on each side of the entrance. The two sides created a confrontational feeling as you couldn't cross the piece and was subjected to visually looking from one side to another. This created a very control space so the narration of the piece was very direct.

Image:

Story 1: The Storyteller Jacket, 1997, Mixed media, 8'x8'

Story 2: Lineage, 1997, Mixed media, 4' x8' x 5'4"

Story 3: Vision on the Television, 1997, Mixed media, 8' x 7' x 2.5'

Story 4: Oh, say can you see, 1997, Mixed Media, 6'x 2' x 3'

Writing has always been part of my process, when writing I see materials visually and how they can create this dialogue with the viewers. These pieces are about four pieces, about my view point, my learning, my family, my humor, and my control. I give myself full ownership of to discuss my world though words and materials. The text became an important part of this piece.

Image: Reservation X: The Power of Place, 1999

Learning, where and how, time and place, words as power. This piece discusses my memory in public schools and my cultural learning. Where it that gives us what is defines us? Is it in a book or is it though stories. Is it full of visions abstractly told in a tribal gathering or in a typed manuscript? What is true and what is false, who questions what and when do we ask questions to challenge?

Image: The Gatherers: 7 Sisters, 1999 Mixed Media, 15' x 15" x15'

Family, women, we follow our bloodline through the women. We take our place as sisters and as leaders. Knowledge of our place in the families, this

piece uses baskets to represent the 7 women in the family and how we are growing and learning. Each basket is a sister who has a different role and different place in the family.

Image: UNVEILING, 2002

Moving and changing, thinking and creating, wanting the baskets to take a different direction to reflect changes and myself using the installation represent me. Like a self-portrait and like a window, sometimes want to be vocal and other times deep in my thoughts.

Image: Three Graces, 2004, Mixed Media, 16'x7'x6'

Three sisters, the older sisters of 7 sisters, taking ground and taking our place as family leaders. Each sister with her own way of thinking is reflected with the materials and design of each dress form. Taking care of our mother and creating a special time to be with her as she goes through her life. Each carrying history and how that history is an integral part of the story.

Slides Image: Talking Books, 2005, Mixed Media, 2'6" x 1'5" x 13'

Books with digital sounds, books with verbal opinions, and books that are temporal like the installation. Tight space to keep the piece separated to support the voices from the books. Books stories are short and to the point.

Slides Image: Figures and Circles, 2005, Mixed Media, 28' x 20" x 13';

Layers of information, very abstractly placed in a two-ring circle. Sound from a video of people reading my story, making themselves to represent me, four men and three women. Seven people being me and seven images of me twirling around. Rats taking the form of survival and my story repeating over and over. Building questions and making people think about what this piece is about. It is layered with information but not easily given.

Slides Image: Sugar Heaven, 2007, Mixed Media, 3' x 9' x 12"

White death, process food, no nutrition, these are foods in our everyday life and we are not changing so it is creating a crisis in our community. Waiting in hospitals and sitting at a funeral, one out of every Native American will become diabetic, developed heart diseases, have high blood pressure and have a stroke. We are different and we have to change. We need to become proactive and be aware of the danger of food.

Image: What's for Dinner, 2007, Mixed Media, 10' x 5' x 3'

Second part of the equation but a vital part of the cycle of disease. This piece is about a banquet of bad food, reflecting what is on the table, reflecting that part of the equation that is how the cycle isn't just about food but also economy. Without money Native people buy cheap bad food, white bread, cakes, cookies, fried chicken and other food that kills our bodies.

Image: The Loss of Yesterday, 2008, Mixed Media, 5' x 3' x 5'

Memories are part of our being, part of our making, and we place these things in different areas of our selves, is it in the brain or is it in the heart,

stored in a book or jar, photographs and texts are all part of this piece. Piece about the fragments of the self being analyzed and living and holding on to moments and memories in various ways.

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The Power of Place in Aboriginal Contemporary Art, ABORIGINAL VOICES, May/June, Canada, Vol. 5, No. 3, pg. 34-37.

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1994 Artists Who are Indian, On & Off The Wall, Denver Art Museum News, Denver, Colorado, Jan/Feb, pg. 4, 1994.

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