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The Artists (Left to Right): Dianne Firth, Freda Sue, Kelsey Merreck Wagner, Humberto Saenz, Michael Cook, Endi Poskovic

Art: Bringing the World to Boone

By Lynn Rees-Jones

Art opens a window to the world. Without packing a suitcase, boarding an airplane and traveling to places far, far away, the cultures and traditions of countries around the globe can be experienced through the arts. Central to the mission of Appalachian State University is a commitment to enhance global awareness and learning opportunities by “bringing the world” to Boone.

Since opening in 2003, the Turchin Center for the Visual Arts has showcased international art from Mexico, China, Poland, South Africa and Brazil. This summer, three of the galleries will feature art from Australia, New Zealand, China and North America, while another exhibition will highlight challenges of the elephant species in Africa and Thailand.

In the Main Gallery the exhibition entitled “Art from Down Under: Australia to New Zealand” will provide exposure to contemporary and indigenous art of Australia and New Zealand artists. Works will include Maori art from New Zealand, and Aboriginal artwork from Australia. Indigenous art is centered on storytelling through pictures and symbols to convey history and beliefs of the culture. Artworks will range across several media, including painting, sculpture, installation, photography, printmaking, book arts, ceramics and glass. Works include spectacular photography of the dynamic New Zealand landscape by John Mailard and photo media of Michael Cook that restages colonial focused histories as

re-imagined through the contemporary reality of indigenous populations.

“Sustained Ingrain: Contemporary Woodcuts from East to West” highlights the oldest method of making prints which emerged in China during the first millennium and, despite constantly changing technologies, has sustained itself as a rich, viable and relevant option for printmaking today. This exhibition features 12 artists from China and 12 artists from North America. Each artist works extensively in the enduring, wild and wonderful medium of woodcut. It raises the question, “How is it possible that the oldest method of making prints is still a rich, viable and relevant option for printmaking today?” The works in the exhibition are diverse in cultural context, creative vision, and innovative process and feature the whimsy of a rhinoceros foot emerging from inside a vividly colored ceramic pot entitled “Rinocerontes” by artist Humberto Saenz of Mexico, to an abstract swirl of colors entitled “Sunshine After the Rain” by artist Freda Sue of China.

Kelsey Merreck Wagner, artist and Appalachian State University alumna, utilizes the visual arts to explore the international ivory trade in an exhibition entitled “The Elephantine in the Anthropocene.” In Africa, elephants are killed every 15 minutes for their tusks. The exhibition explores historic hunting practices in African countries, the ivory trade in Asia, and how modern conservation

is working fervently to save the species. The exhibition features hand-painted paper elephants that are stuffed and artfully stitched together with yarn. Each elephant seems to have a unique personality and their placement and grouping mimic the social habits found in their natural habitat. The visual impact of the exhibition is enhanced with audio that conveys the sounds of elephants in their natural wilderness environment. This exhibition heightens awareness that cultural sensitivity and interdisciplinary collaboration are necessary to stop this ecological crisis and while humans are the invasive species, they can also be part of the solution.

The arts tell stories in many ways and from many perspectives. A visit to the international exhibitions at the Turchin Center will provide a lasting collection of stories which rival the experience of visiting the world’s most interesting artistic destinations. ■

The Turchin Center for the Visual Arts is the largest facility of its kind in the region and fulfills Appalachian State University’s long-held mission of providing a home for world-class visual arts programming. The TCVA is located at 423 West King St. in Boone. Hours are 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday, and noon - 8 p.m., Friday. Admission is always free, although donations are gratefully accepted. For more information, to become a donor, be added to the mailing list or schedule a tour call 828-262-3017 or visit tcva.org. You can also follow the Turchin Center on Facebook and Twitter @TurchinCenter.