

Artist adapts health care issues into exhibit

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These are no ordinary chairs.

One is called the Dementia Chair. Another, the Anorexia Chair. Then there's the Breast Cancer Chair and the Melancholia Chair.

These unusual chairs, each set up as specific tableaux, were inspired by an examination of women's health care in Western culture, taken from personal accounts, documented records, scientific studies and literary interpretations.

For Lawrence-based artist Marguerite Perret, the chairs illustrate "the poetics of pain, the humor of healing and the poignancy of personal strength."

"They're based on my experiences, and the experiences of my family," she said. "But it becomes richer and broader because of many other voices."

The chairs are part of a larger multimedia installation called "The Waiting Room," that incorporates performance, sculpture, sound and image.

Perret is collaborating on the project with Topeka-based ceramic and textile artist Stephanie Lanter, Lawrence artist Bruce Scherting and Oakland, Calif., artist Robin Lasser, along with selected writers, historians, medical professionals and the general public.

The installation has been a continual work in progress, Perret said, "that keeps getting bigger and bigger."

Adding 'health' chairs

Perret plans to add to the installation in Salina, where she will be the Salina Art Center's newest artist-in-residence beginning Monday. Perret will reside at the Art Center Warehouse, 149 S. Fourth, through Aug. 1.

During her residency, Perret will encourage community participation in helping her add more health care-inspired chairs and other elements to the installation, which she will continue to work on at the Warehouse.

"Community participation is really critical," she said. "I want to get people's concerns about health care and health issues. I'm not talking about politics, but the issues people are concerned about in their lives."

Perret will have open studio hours to discuss these and other issues from noon to 3 p.m. July 6, 13, 20 and 27 and from 5 to 7 p.m. July 22 and 29 at the Art Center Warehouse.

Additionally, Perret will host three free workshops with Lanter during the month, each focusing on a different aspect of the installation. All workshops will be at the warehouse.

From 1 to 4 p.m. July 17, Perret and Lanter will lead a workshop on creating ceramic ex-votos and milagros, healing charms with cross-cultural and historical origins. They will host a similar workshop from 1 to 5 p.m. July 24 on the creation of mixed-media ex-votos and milagros.

Selected materials from each workshop will be included in "The Waiting Room" installation, Perret said.

Recalling family, friends

In a similar vein, Perret and Lanter will collaborate with community members to crochet 3-inch knit or granny squares in memory of family or friends who have suffered from dementia or served as a caretaker.

"My dad died of dementia, which was very traumatic for our family, and my mother was a caretaker," she said. "So I come to this from a very personal experience."

Instruction will be offered in basic crochet techniques, and participants are encouraged to bring articles of clothing or other mementos of individuals to be memorialized in the granny squares.

"People can create something very personalized for them," she said.

Perret said she is grateful for the opportunity to develop her ongoing installation while artist-in-residence at the Salina Art Center.

"They have a very strong reputation here, so I wanted to be part of that," she said.

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