

Pleasant Hill • Martinez RECORD

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2010 • VOL. 21, NO. 32

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Project links artists across the centuries

DVC art collective members put their touch on unfinished 17th century works

By Janice De Jesus

Correspondent

ORINDA — When Martinez figurative painter TaVee Magner came across an old book of drawings by 17th century artist Claude Lorrain at a thrift shop, she thought the discarded book could have some potential. She passed it on to fellow artist Myra Latkin.

As a well-traveled landscape painter, Latkin immediately saw that the book had more than just potential — its contents had to be given new life.

"I looked at those pastoral 17th century landscapes and something clicked," Latkin said. "I thought, 'Wouldn't it be fun to comment on these Renaissance drawings with a 21st century visual sensibility?'"

That's when Magner and Latkin,

ACROSS THE CENTURIES

- **WHAT:** Kunstanke Art Group: 'The Claude Lorrain Project: A Conversation Across the Centuries'
- **WHEN:** Through Dec. 29
- **WHERE:** Orinda Library Art Gallery, 26 Orinda Way
- **INFORMATION:** Visit www.kunstanke.com

along with fellow artists they met through Diablo Valley College art classes known as the Kunstanke Art Collective ("kunstanke" meaning "art thought" in Norwegian), got together to literally take the book apart.

Pages of Claude Lorrain's drawings were cut out and randomly distributed to the artists, who then created their own responses to the unfinished nature of the drawings by adding their unique artistic touches.

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TAVEE MAGNER



KUNSTANKE ART COLLECTIVE

Brigitte Bize, one of the contributing artists, helped with the setup of the new Kunstanke exhibit, The Claude Lorrain Project: A Conversation Across the Centuries. At left, "His Name Shall be Darwin" is one of the pieces on exhibit through Dec. 29 at the Orinda Library Art Gallery.

Kunstanke

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"Everyone enthusiastically took up the idea and we went to work," Latkin said. "At first, I responded using pen and ink with line drawings in the classical style but using absurd context. But others in the group expanded the concept and began using collage, paint, stamps, wax, imprinting, burning, etc."

"Every month, more ideas emerged and found their way onto the original prints. That's why, attached to each picture, we placed a transparency of the original etching so people could see the transformation."

After much discussion, the group decided to place the finished works on various earth tone textured fabric and simple frames, Latkin said. Forty-five finished works are on display at the Orinda Library gallery through Dec. 29.

Kunstanke artists live in Martinez, Orinda, Danville and Livermore. Previous members, whose handiwork is part of the exhibit, also include residents of Pleasant Hill, Walnut Creek and Moraga, Magner said.

Claude Lorrain is currently creating quite a buzz in the art world, Magner said.

"He's one of the first artists who went out and drew landscapes from real life," she said. "He was basically doing preparatory drawings. Some drawings were unfinished and we thought we would have fun completing them by bringing images of our time into his world."

Each artist received a stack of eight pages and got to decide whether to keep them for themselves to work on or pass on to the other artists. For instance, five art-

ists worked on just one piece which gradually morphed as it passed through various hands, Magner said.

The artists were free to create — or in this case recreate — but within certain parameters. They had to maintain the size of the page (11 1/2 by 9 1/2 inches) and some part of the Lorrain image had to be present in the final piece, which had to be two-dimensional, Magner said.

The result of the project — a virtual conversation that links artists across the centuries.

"We are talking to Claude Lorrain through his work and ours," Magner said. "But he doesn't get to talk back much. We're trying to interact with the ideals and ideas of his era — a lot of it was pastoral 17th century."

In one of the pieces, "Insurgents," Magner — using her skills in collage — blended Lorrain's original pastoral image with an image of a soldier cut out from a National Geographic magazine.

"I juxtaposed his beautiful pastoral world with what's going on in certain parts of the world — revolution, people fighting for land. It's not so beautiful."

She passed this same piece on to other artists who provided their visual response.

"As an artist, you have to know when to let go. Even if we don't agree, we have admiration and respect for each other — it's all part of the adventure."

Jimmie Beardsley said she's proud her fellow artists are showing at the library gallery.

"It seemed a natural fit, seeing the original material had come from a book, and that the pieces that resulted were a perfect juxtaposition of classic 17th century style with a 21st century attitude," Beardsley said.

Their small Contra Costa County artist group, formed eight years ago, meets monthly to share ideas and critique individual work, she said.

Other local artists who contributed to the exhibit are Brigitte Bize, Kari Brinck,

Phyllis Lasché and former Kunstanke members Becky Busi, Shun-An Lee and Marina Li.

"This is our first and only collaborative effort. The success of the previous shows has been quite encouraging and it's proven to be great fun as a group effort," Beardsley said.

"The selection process — of what goes and what stays, what needs to be worked on, etc., is quite lively. It's especially funny when we have to declare a piece 'DOA,' but this is just part of the creative process. All told, only the best survive and we hope that the public enjoy the pieces as much as we've enjoyed making them."