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Art Exhibit Highlights Cycle of Stuff

By Meghan Dusek

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OCT. 6, 2006--Russian author Boris Pasternak, best known for his epic novel, "Doctor Zhivago," wrote that art "has two constants, two unending concerns: it always mediates on death and thus always creates life."

The art exhibit at Gallery 101 at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls featuring the concrete mosaic work of Wouterina "Riana" de Raad and Gary Peterson exemplifies this cycle.

A number of unconventional shapes that seem like they've been rescued from the trash are inside the first floor gallery--disembodied heads, crows, mirrored candelabras and Grecian-style urns decorated with plates familiar from grandma's collection. However upon examining the works the fluidity and interconnections between the pieces are obvious as well as each artist's distinct style.



An avid gardener as well as an artist, Peterson is 1986 B.F.A. graduate of UW-RF and only recently started working with concrete when he took a class from de Raad a few years ago.

Peterson's primary focus with his works, he says, is to "embellish the gardens." It's impossible to pinpoint Peterson's primary influences with his works; his training as a painter is evident in his use of color but with influences and designs range from Celtic knotwork to Navajo rugs.

His urns are particularly entrancing--most use a four-panel orientation that allows for each side to demonstrate a different awareness through design or the vintage china that often make a kind of faceplate.

"Everything is found," Peterson stresses. "I love junking, it's basically junk I found that I liked for one reason or another." A piece of junk has an interesting historical and cultural significance, says Peterson. On his globe piece, there is a shard of glass representing Iraq that actually came from one of Saddam Hussein's palaces, according to Peterson.

Peterson says his artistic process begins a fairly vague way: "I fill in the facets as I go."

In contrast, de Raad's approach is much different from Peterson's in that she says she approaches each work with a definite purpose. "I want to tell a story," says de Raad, who has taught at regional art centers and the UW-River Falls Pigeon Lake Field Station in Drummond, Wis.

Over the past 17 years Riana has created more than 40 figures that make up a sculpture garden at her home in Beldenville, where she offers public tours by appointment (for more information go to

<http://www.concretemosaicsculpture.com/>). Some of her works recreate life, such as depicting a family hanging out clothes, or are symbolic in other ways, such as a scene in Gallery 101.

The story being conveyed revolves around the central figure--an old man, the last member of the Tuesday Club, Riana calls him--surrounded by crows accustomed to his presence and know not to fear this virtual relic. The connection between crows and death is not coincidental, as seen by the angel behind the old man. It is necessary to see the installation to understand the full weight of the work; the interplay between the dullness of the old man and the brilliance of the angel as well as the near-sheen of the crows displays her incredible prowess in this field.

Born in Holland, Riana has a long history with the River Falls area. She obtained an education in fiber arts at UW-RF and also ran the Ragstock store in town for 18 years, an eclectic, funky place fondly remembered and missed by thrift and vintage shoppers in the region. She ran it solely on her own. "I handpicked everything that was in the store," she said.

The exhibit runs through Oct. 16. A reception for the artists is planned for Wednesday, Oct. 11 from 4 to 8 p.m. Gallery 101 hours are 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. and 7 - 9 p.m., Monday - Friday and 2 - 4 p.m. Sunday. Admission is free. For more information contact the UW-RF art department at 715-425-3266.

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