

Fall November 15, 2018

Northfield art exhibit shows amateur artists' expressions of gratitude



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Arts

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Paulina Borrego contributed a "garland" in remembrance of her father, who died in August, for the art exhibit on display at Dickinson Memorial Library. STAFF PHOTO/MAX MARCUS » [Buy this Image](#)



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As the time of year for giving thanks is rolling around, gratitude in myriad forms is the theme of a diverse exhibit in the Dickinson Memorial Library's art gallery this month.

This exhibit is different from what is usually shown in the library's gallery in that it is all amateur work. Jinx Hastings, the Northfield resident who organized the exhibit, said she especially wanted submissions from people who don't necessarily see themselves as artists.

"I wouldn't say any of them are extraordinary artists in any way," she said. "They just wanted to express what gratitude meant for them."

"We all have different interpretations," she explained. "I don't want it to be political, I don't want it to be Thanksgiving, I don't want it to be Christmas. I want it to be just gratitude. What it really means. ... Gratitude is more than just 'thank you.' It's more like a give and take. It's about receiving, also."

Hastings is a retired art teacher, so she came up with an open-ended assignment to help inspire and motivate people who were not used to making art, and gathered the pieces together in early October.

She gave a handful of suggestions for how to approach the project: write the word "gratitude" in expressive shapes and colors; take a photo of something that has brought you joy; display an object you created or something you discovered in nature; or create an abstract work.

There are 28 pieces in the exhibit. Most people, Hastings thought, would probably follow one of her suggested approaches. But the pieces vary widely in the types of art and the perspectives they take on gratitude.



"I'm hoping kids will come to stop and think for a minute. It's such a hurry-up society," she said.

Northfield resident Eveline MacDougall contributed a collage about her gratitude for the social power of music and for her own musical upbringing. MacDougall is the founder and director of the Amandla Chorus, a group that performs music from cultures around the world as well as original compositions.

"Any music that expresses the right of people to survive and thrive is of interest to me," MacDougall said.

She learned about the importance of music in personal identity from an early age. Both of MacDougall's parents were classically trained musicians. But her mother, who had grown up in Quebec, also had a deep connection to French-Canadian folk music.

"That music kept my people alive as much as the food they were able to put by through the winter," MacDougall said. "It carries with it centuries of determination to be recognized within a larger culture that was pretty oppressive of the French."

Northfield resident Paulina Borrego, who works as a librarian at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, has a hobby of turning old library book cards into “garlands” to decorate her desk at work. For the exhibit, she contributed a garland she made in August when her father Jose Maria Borrego Llarralde died.

The garland Borrego made uses photos of her father and print mementos from his funeral, like the cover of the program and a copy of his obituary from the Boston Globe. Condolence cards she received from friends became cutout panels of color and patterns on the garland, along with the coasters from the restaurant they went to after the funeral.

“Because what do you do with those after?” Borrego said. “When they sit in a closet or a drawer, you don’t really see them. This is something you can see. ... To me that’s what art does. It puts you in a moment.”

Borrego said she enjoys how the exhibit allows viewers to appreciate the positive aspects of life, while giving amateur artists a chance to shine.

“In this world of want, I think it is important to step aside and pause, and think of the larger picture,” she explained. “That would be maybe the time we live in, the space we live in, all the good things that happen in our lives.”

“I think this is the first time we’ve had a community-supported exhibit (in the library’s gallery, rather than work from professional artists), and I hope we do it again,” she added. “It’s kind of hodge-podgy and kitschy, and not as professional, but it shows the strength and diversity of the community.”

The exhibit is on display during library hours — 1 to 8 p.m. on Tuesdays, 1 to 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Fridays, and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays — through the end of November.

Staff reporter Max Marcus started working at the Greenfield Recorder this year. He covers Northfield, Bernardston, Leyden and Warwick. He can be reached at: mmarcus@recorder.com or 413-772-0261, ext. 261.