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Visual arts center showcases returning artist

By James E. Thomas

This week marks the final week students and staff will be able to go to the Anna Lamar Switzer Gallery in building 15, the Visual Arts Center where the exhibit will be showing through Oct. 6, to enjoy “A Drop of Water, A Grain of Sand” a retrospective showcase of Jacqueline Bishop’s art over the past 30 years.

Bishop is a highly regarded New Orleans artist who draws much of the inspiration for her artwork from the environmental devastation she’s seen while traveling abroad over the past 30 years.

Does all art need a deeper meaning to it? For Bishop the answer is clear; it does.

“I’m drawn to work that communicates on a deeper level issues that are social, political, global, personal, or universal.” said Bishop. “Otherwise it (art) is sort of like decoration.”

Bishop’s artwork is a vivid representation and commentary on global and environmental issues, but for many she’s more than just a talented artist with an eye for detail.

“She’s an ecologist.” said Vivian Spencer, director of the Anna Lamar Switzer Gallery. “In my mind that is her root, that is her heart of hearts, that’s where her passion is, and that’s what drives her method.”

Bishop’s drive comes not only from her deep love for the environment but also the devastation she’s seen done to it first hand during her travels over the past 30 years. The most motivating

moments in her life came from witnessing the deforestation of the rainforest in the Dominican Republic in 1975, the slash and burn operations in the Brazilian Amazonian jungles during the 1980's and the later the sobering realization that many of the birds that had been the subjects of so many of her paintings were now extinct.

Originally born in California she traveled often as a child. Bishop studied philosophy and art at the University of Kansas before going to the University of New Orleans to get her bachelors in painting then, moving on to Tulane University for her master's degree in fine arts. Later, she went on to teach art at Tulane University and Loyola University. However, it's in New Orleans that she fell in love with the wetlands and waterways of the Gulf Coast, and made a new home for herself.

“If the world knew the significance of swamps and wetlands they would treat them with care and protect them. Swamps are very clean, they clean the environment and are a magnificent, sophisticated natural system with everything harmoniously working together to make things work.” Bishop said.

Her love for the environment and creatures it in can be seen clearly in her striking and vivid artwork, one of which she graciously donated to PSC's vast, permanent collection of art totaling some 500 or more pieces that will be rotating through the new gallery.

The piece Bishop donated is entitled “Sonatina” and is a large lithograph over archival pigment print. The background for the piece is a mix of sheet music, newspaper clippings, old advertisements, photos, and drawings all laid together in a seemingly chaotic but fluid collage that draws your eye across the piece. Incredibly detailed deep-black prints of many types of

flora and fauna lay across the foreground of the piece, each catching your eye and holding it before your attention is drawn to elsewhere within the art.

“I really like it (Sonatina) a lot. And, it’s amazing too because the master printer that printed that is actually someone we’ve shown here, and he’s in our permanent collection.” said Krist L. Lien, Department Head of the Visual Arts Center. “So, it’s kind of like you realize what a small world it is.”

“The message that she’s sending out is important because she’s (Bishop) so affected by social issues and environmental issues that are really at the forefront for a lot of people. Especially younger people right now who are realizing this is the world they’re coming into and that they’re going to inherit.” added Lien.

So why should students come visit the gallery and see Bishop’s artwork?

“Art in general the sole purpose is to provoke an emotion. Whether it’s makes you happy or sad, or you hate it... it promotes something and you’re getting something out of it.” said Lien.

“I think you need to come and be surprised...and just take the time to look at the art. It’s about leading a full and cultured life.” Spencer said.

This is the last week of the exhibit so come see it while you can. The gallery is open Monday through Thursday from 8 am to 9 pm, and Fridays from 8 am to 4 pm, so come enjoy it for yourself.