

FIRE, FURY, & RESILIENCE

BETTY LADUKE AT GRANTS PASS MUSEUM OF ART

 BY LYNN LEISSLER  PROVIDED BY GRANTS PASS MUSEUM OF ART

JUST TAKE YOUR TIME. BLINK. SIGH. RELAX.

- LAWSON FUSAO INADA

Grants Pass Museum of Art's current exhibit, *Fire, Fury, & Resilience*, *Totem Witnesses and Turtle Wisdom*, features artist Betty LaDuke, and runs March 29 – May 20. This thought-provoking exhibit is relevant to local, national, and worldwide events over the past few years.

Like many artists, Betty first gravitated to color and design as a young child. Her parents supplied her with colored pencils and paper, encouraging her interest. Window shades and tubes of color used by her house-painter father became her early canvases. The family lived in The Bronx, where schools bused students to museums and where Betty spent time in the public library. All this set the stage for a young girl to envision an art career. She attended a summer camp, Workers Children's Camp, and there she met kids from all over the city. The varying ethnicities of campers and counselors also helped chart her path. Unable to send her to college, her father urged, "Do it for yourself." Through scholarships and jobs she did. Eventually, she and her husband made Ashland their home. Betty was part of the Southern Oregon University Art Department for 32 years.

Betty's body of work reflects deep concern for various issues and the human condition, especially those who are marginalized, their suffering and their joy. She has traveled the world for over 60 years, including 18 trips to Africa from 1986 to 2002. Her exhibits have hung temporarily or are permanently housed in sites in Oregon (including the Medford International Airport), California, New York, and several other states, as well as the National Museum in Eritrea, Africa. She worked with women artists in Africa, counting it a high privilege. Betty also worked with Heifer International, and 30 of her paintings permanently reside at their national headquarters in Little Rock, Arkansas. Here at home, she is the second recipient of the Oregon Arts Medallion Award.

Betty describes her current work: "Alone in my Oregon studio the world rushes in and I have a compelling need to give form to the local and global events shaping our lives. They are Climate Change, the Pandemic, Border Crossings, and Social Justice. How have these events affected us, our families and communities? How can we express our pain, resilience, and hope? Totem Witnesses and Turtle Wisdom become my response."

She explains Totem Witness as tall wood panels inspired by Native American Totem poles. The work begins with sketchbook drawings, which she transfers to plywood panels about 62"x24". Then, using a skill saw and a router, she delineates shapes and gives depth, often redefining as she works. Some pieces are layered, and multi-coats of paint soak into the thirsty wood.

Climate Change addresses the effects of Southern Oregon's ongoing drought, wild winds, and devastating fires in forests and in communities. Betty hosted and witnessed a friend's traumatization following the Almeda Fire, though the woman's home was spared. Later, a ride through the devastation drove home its reality.

The Pandemic series addresses what we have lived since 2020. In Border Crossings, she speaks to the plight of traumatized, desperate people fleeing the horrors of their homeland. And finally, Social Justice portrays the need for wrongs to be righted, for cruelty to cease.

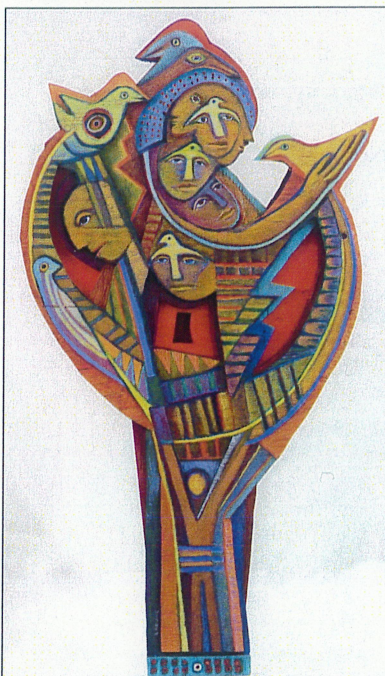
And Turtle Wisdom...the title might give you pause. Betty sees turtles as symbols that tie humankind to the earth, and our choices that can destroy our environment or ensure a livable future.

To view these pieces in her studio was magic in its own right, and allowed this writer to see other pieces as well. "Stand here...walk there...turn around..." she directed. Even in that setting, with the pieces leaning against walls and tables, their power was palpable. One wall proudly displays pictures drawn by young grandchildren, now grown. Yes, Betty is a

grandmother. In fact, she is 89, though using misguided perceptions of what that number entails, she doesn't fit the mold.

The exhibit has its own beauty, but viewers need to take their time, to not merely register an initial reaction. Betty's written descriptions will help people understand her intent behind each creation. Former Oregon Poet Laureate, Lawson Fusao Inada, wrote a poem to accompany the exhibit, realizing how easily we can judge something we are unfamiliar with or that we don't understand. He urges us to take our time: "Allow each creation – alluring, engaging – to greet you back... Upon your departure, retain the creations in your spacious mind."

At a time when our nation, our world, has undergone such upheaval, it is important to consider varying perspectives. We've read stories by



individuals, columnists, newspaper and television reporters, all who use words. We've seen photographs. An art medium whose symbolism interprets those words and photographs allows us to go deeper. Perhaps, if we do as Inada suggests, we will be inspired to be part of the solution.

From her early days as director of the Grants Pass Museum of Art, Hyla Lipson has received notes from Betty about her newest art and exhibit ideas. Twice, the museum featured solo shows. "Since then we have become friends and the more I communicate with her, the more I am in awe of her creativity, energy, thoughtfulness, and persistence," she says, appreciating that Betty stays in touch. When Betty began promoting *Fire, Fury, & Resilience*, Hyla knew the exhibit would be timely and evocative. There is an accompanying catalogue, enabled by grants from the Josephine County Cultural Coalition and the Ford Family Foundation, available for attendees while supplies last.

Both Hyla and Betty are excited about children visiting the exhibit, thrilled they will have the opportunity to view something perhaps different than they've ever seen.

Following the Grants Pass showing, Betty plans to have the pieces go on tour.

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