

Around
THE CORNERS

Flowing, beautiful ... and repulsive?

Artist Rosemary Meza-DesPlas often uses her own hair to sew drawings

BY LIZ WEBER
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FARMINGTON – From a distance, the art pieces look like they’re made from the soft scratching of pencil on paper, short lines filling the space, etching a jawline and filling in the soft curve of an eye.

But upon closer inspection, it’s possible to see that what looked like the lines of a pencil are actually short hairs, weaving in and out of the canvas to create the image of a woman staring back at you.

Rosemary Meza-DesPlas first began experimenting with sewing her own hair into her art pieces in 2000. While it started with an off-handed comment from a friend, she said she was drawn to the idea and the challenge of a new art form. Meza-DesPlas, who had never sewn before then, began experimenting with different canvas materials and needles.

An exhibit at San Juan College before the coronavirus pandemic, explored Meza-DesPlas’ journey as an artist and her experimentation. The exhibit, which spans the last 20 years of her work, includes graphite drawings, hand-sewn human hair drawings, mixed-media work and a piece Meza-DesPlas drew directly on one of the walls of the gallery.

Meza-DesPlas said she has been drawn to the dichotomy associated with hair. In one context it can be seen as “luxurious, flowing and beautiful,” but in another it can be seen as repulsive.

“It’s the context that determines people’s reaction to it,” she said.

To collect the hair, she said she will use her fingers to comb through it in the morning then at the end of the week sift through what she has gathered, label it and store it away. She said the current exhibit at San Juan College shows how her process and use of her own hair has evolved and developed in her art.

A new challenge Meza-DesPlas is exploring with hair drawings is incorporating her gray hair. The different color has allowed her to explore



LIZ WEBER/Durango Herald photos

Rosemary Meza-DesPlas studies one of her drawings at her exhibit “Marks, Strokes, and Scribbles: A Survey of Drawings” earlier this year at San Juan College.



Displayed at San Juan College Art Gallery earlier this year, Meza-DesPlas’ exhibit “Marks, Strokes, and Scribbles: A Survey of Drawings,” showcases her drawings spanning the past two decades.

new materials and canvases to work with. On display at the exhibit is a work in progress featuring her gray hair.

Meza-DesPlas said she is continually fascinated with drawing because it’s universal.

“All you need is a pencil. All you need to do is leave a mark,” she said.

Meza-DesPlas was born and raised in Texas, in a

suburb of Dallas, and she said, like all artists, her background has seeped into her artwork. Her primary focus is on the female experience in a patriarchal society, with influences coming from current events, pop culture and social media. A past theme she explored in an earlier exhibit focused on how women shooting guns or holding guns are

often sexualized in Hollywood action movies.

A lot of her influences come across as more symbolic because it “opens up more avenues for interpretation.”

She and her husband – who works at San Juan College – moved to Farmington in 2016, when she decided to focus on her art full time. She was previously a professor in Texas for 16 years. She said the transition to full-time artist has allowed her to slow down and focus.

“There’s more time to research and explore ideas,” she said. “The process isn’t as rushed.”

The exhibit pulls from past projects and themes Meza-DesPlas has explored, some of which have been exhibited in Chicago, New York City, South Korea, China and France.

Because the exhibit spans Meza-DesPlas’ life as an artist, she said it is a unique opportunity to reflect and study her earlier influences and recurring themes.

“It’s fun to see the connec-

tions, to see how certain pieces are talking to each other across time,” she said.

The exhibit has also given her an opportunity to reflect on how society has changed in the past two decades. While she said there is no lack of issues affecting women, including an imbalance of power, she has noticed a difference.

“In the last four years, there’s been more (art) shows with sociopolitical content challenging different issues,” she said.

A piece Meza-DesPlas had drawn directly onto the gallery wall depicts the different hairstyles worn by the suffragists. She said it is a way to look back at the different waves of feminism and the “ancestry of anger.” While it took her a couple days to draw it, at the end of the exhibit, the piece will be painted over.

“I’m leaving my mark wherever I go,” she said. “It’s still there, hidden.”

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