



ROBERT FROST STOPS BY THE WOODS AT CROOKED TREE

Glen Young - January 11th, 2010

Robert Frost 'Stops by the Woods' at Crooked Tree

By Glen Young

Gail DeMeyere could not be more excited about her upcoming exhibition. DeMeyere, curator at Petoskey's Crooked Tree Arts Center, has put together "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," a mixed media presentation that takes the Robert Frost poem of the same name as its unifying theme, combining the literature with the art work of 16 Northern Michigan artists.

Published in 1923, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is one of Frost's most recognized poems. Told by a nameless narrator, the poem radiates from a brief moment stopped with his horse near a neighbor's woodlot as night is falling. Frost, who wrote the poem in June, considered it one of his best compositions.

Collaborating on the project are Northern Michigan artists including Elizabeth Pollie, Doug Melvin, Penny Kristo, and others. The exhibition will highlight different media, including painting, stained glass, even quilting.

"I have a great love of poetry," DeMeyere says. "I have had all my life."

As such, she says she's always on the lookout for inspiration. "My job here as curator is to come up with ideas and execute them."

DeMeyere says she didn't want to give the artists too many directives. She was adamant about the size of each work, however. "I did say it had to be at least 30 by 40 (inches) or larger in size. The interesting part for me is how all these artists are interpreting it."

The exhibition is by invitation. DeMeyere contacted the 16 artists last summer, and says they were all enthusiastic about signing on. "It wasn't a problem finding artists. The challenge was to get the mixed media."

IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

Petoskey painter Doug Melvin, also a retired professor of art at North Central Michigan College, jumped at the chance to participate in the exhibition. "I thought it was a great idea," Melvin, who has the line, "To ask if there is some mistake," says he had an idea immediately, but soon fixed on something more convincing.

"We don't know exactly who he is," Melvin says of the poem's narrator.

"But we have Robert Frost in mind. So since it's narrated by the driver I wanted the point of view to be from the driver's seat."

Melvin, who says he doesn't ordinarily paint such large canvasses, called on his rural neighbors for assistance. Using a sleigh the neighbors have in their barn, and their horse Pepper, Melvin took several photos last summer for reference. He says he typically paints on location, but says for this he had to use photos, "It wasn't practical any other way."

Melvin's perspective angles across the back of the driver. "Mine's from the driver's head; you see his gloves and feet as if you were looking from your own eyes, toward the horse."

Melvin is excited to see the work of the other fifteen artists. "I have no idea what other people are doing, which is going to be part of the excitement of the show."

"These are artists who would not normally show together," DeMeyere says of

the eclectic collection of artists.

A POEM IN GLASS

Penny Kristo, who has worked in stained glass for 35 years, says when she got the call, "I just started thinking about what a snowy wood in Vermont would look like in the early part of the (20th) century."

Kristo, who says she once completed a similar project creating stained glass windows based on favorite religious hymns, says for this project, "I tried to use as many elements of the craft as possible." She incorporated natural agates, Petoskey stones, and fractured streamer glass into her 30 inch by 40-inch design. Her design has nearly 500 individual pieces. "I enjoyed making the piece that size. It gave me more freedom, almost," she says.

Kristo wasted no time after receiving the invitation. "I made it this summer, as soon as I got the assignment." She says the work took her most of a month to complete. "I just threw myself into the idea and enjoyed it."

Harbor Springs painter Elizabeth Pollie, working with the line, "My little horse must think it queer," is familiar with using text together with artwork. "I was a freelance illustrator for a number of years so I am quite familiar with connecting image with text."

Pollie says, "The most difficult part of my process as a painter is transcribing my internal image to the canvas." She says, "The underlying mood is solitude bordering on isolation."

As for the large size, Pollie, who once composed a series on the horses of Mackinac Island, says, "I tend to spend a great deal of time applying the paint and stepping back at least 20 feet. It is impossible to read the piece well unless you have a good deal of distance between you and the painting."

DeMeyere admits her objective for the exhibition is multi-faceted. "I hope to educate, to influence, and to engage people. I hope people understand how important the written word is."

She says that while the artists saw only their own work while completing the project, "In my head, I see the whole thing."

In hopes of engaging area students, DeMeyere has scheduled a poetry slam for February 20, to augment the Frost exhibition. "It's a raw idea right now," she says. Her hope is to use the Frost display to inspire area young people to turn to poetry for inspiration.

"Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" opens January 16, and runs through April 8. For more information about the show or other events at Crooked Tree, contact the arts center at 231-347-4337, or visit the website at www.crookedtree.org.