



In "Extreme Unction," artist Sharon Kopriva borrows from the Catholic sanction of "extreme unction" or the "last rite."

A Ceremony of Rituals

Artist Sharon Kopriva expresses the universal relationships of birth, death, love and life in "Rituals," her exhibit at the MSC Visual Arts Gallery.

By Kimber Huff
THE BATTALION

The Visual Arts Committee is sponsoring a new exhibit entitled "Rituals." The exhibit began Nov. 21 and will run through Jan. 12 in the Visual Arts Gallery on the second floor of the Memorial Student Center.

The artist, Sharon Kopriva, is a Houston native and a graduate of the University of Houston whose artwork focuses on rituals in nature and in the Catholic Church.

Clyde Brown, the Visual Arts Committee chair and a senior environmental design major, said members of the Visual Arts Committee were impressed when they saw Kopriva's work in New Orleans.

"They saw Kopriva's work on display and decided to bring it here," Brown said.

The exhibit contains 11 pieces of Kopriva's work, which is constructed mostly from paper-maché, bones and furs.

Brown said Kopriva's artwork also stems from her traveling experiences.

"The work was inspired by visits to Peru, where she saw some of the mummies they were digging up there," Brown said. "So a lot of these things look like old, dried-up mummies."

Brown said other inspirations came from Native American rituals, and Kopriva's experiences with the Catholic Church.

Brown said the exhibit is guaranteed to draw attention.

"Some students are simply frightened by it," Brown said. "On the other hand, some are interested in the touch and texture of the art."

Brown said there is also a great deal of symbolism that students not familiar with Catholicism may not understand.

One of Kopriva's works that deals with the religion is "The Penitent Monk."

"The Penitent Monk' represents the religious person who has devoted his life to prayer. The nails represent penance and sacrifice," Kopriva said. "His life and ritual are one and the same."

"Extreme Unction" is a complex work that contains five figures, a dying woman, a priest and three spirits.

Kopriva said she addresses three themes in "Extreme Unction."

"Medical science and technology are represented with the table and painted medical charts. The Catholic sacrament of 'Extreme Unction' (Last Rites) is expressed by the priest with the book and anointing oil. He deals specifically with the mind and soul of the woman," said Kopriva. "Lastly, the three weavers represent a natural religion and are painstakingly weaving the body back to nature, where it will eventually become a renewed life form."

Kopriva also places a great deal of emphasis on natural religion. "Horned Ceremony," representing an ancient ritual, and "Buck," representing regeneration and rebirth, demonstrate this emphasis.

Kopriva's other works include "The Nestler," a burial pot, and "Eternal Bliss," a sculpture with two mummies intertwined.

"[Eternal Bliss] represents the ritual of making love, in this case by 500-year-old mummies," Kopriva said.

"Monsignor" and "Barthel," a horned alter boy, are two more works that deal with the Catholic Church.

Brown said students have been enraged by how Kopriva depicts the Catholic Church, and he cautions students to keep an open mind.

"She's not trying to condemn the Catholic Church," Brown said. "This is just her view of some of her experiences."

Brown said that the art symbolizes "not just death and decay of the church, but the continuation of life."

Brown said though the images may seem strange at first, the overall theme of the exhibit is a positive one.

"The images are all of things that have died or are dying or are very old," Brown said. But many of them are intended to look forward to another stage of life." -Photos by Dave House



"Buck" represents nature's regeneration and rebirth.



"Monsignor" depicts a Catholic official in the ritual act of his daily duties in the Church.

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