

Salina Journal

More than just drawing

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New show examines the use of graphite in contemporary art

By Gary Demuth

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The inspiration for Salina Art Center's upcoming exhibit was a pencil.

Actually, it's the graphite found at the center of a pencil. Sharpen the pencil to a point, and one can draw works of art on paper or another surface.

Graphite-based drawing is one of the oldest forms of art expression in history, said Heather Ferrell, Salina Art Center executive director and curator.

"Humans have been drawing with graphite since cave paintings," she said. "How creating art with graphite has changed in thousands of years, or even in the last 20 years, is the point of this exhibit."

"Leaded: The Materiality and Metamorphosis of Graphite" opens Thursday at the art center, 242 S. Santa Fe, and runs through Aug. 10.

An opening reception will be from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday at the art center. Ferrell will make opening remarks at 5:30 p.m.

The exhibition features 44 works of art by 16 contemporary artists who use the physical nature and characteristics of graphite to create works of two- and three-dimensional art.

"It's not just about drawing, although that's part of it," Ferrell said. "Artists also approach this form in unique ways, through painting, sculpture and other forms of art."

"Leaded" is a national touring exhibition developed by the University of Richmond Museums in Virginia and organized for tour by International Arts Artists, Washington, D.C.

Salina is the fourth stop of a nine-city U.S. tour, Ferrell said.

The artists represented in the exhibition have an international flavor. They include Americans James Busby, Tara Donovan, Tom Friedman, Meghan Gerety, Michael Joaquin Grey, Sarah Lovitt, Creighton Michael, Mark Sheinkman and Stephen Sollins; Hsin-Hsi Chen (Taiwan); Marco Maggi (Uruguay); Stephana McClure (Northern Ireland); Shimon Okshteyn (Ukraine, now living in America); and Gloria Ortiz-Hernandez, (Colombia).

Graphite as content

The exhibition groups these artists' works into three, overlapping themes, Ferrell said.

The first is "graphite as content." In these works, the subject matter is merged with the graphite medium

to create original drawings. Cook creates primordial "landscapes" made from graphite, oil and resin on aluminum sheets. Gerety creates silhouettes of leaves and trees from accumulated layers of graphite on wood panels.

Sheinkman uses powder graphite to cover a piece of paper, then lightly erases the graphite, creating what Ferrell said are "very ethereal, beautiful works of billowing smoke."

The second theme is "graphite as a transformative agent." These are two- and three-dimensional objects made of materials transformed through the application or removal of graphite. Examples are Lovitt's mixture of graphite and wax that transforms traditional drawing material into a mass, and Busby's monolithic paintings of graphite and gesso on canvas to resemble heavy industrial products.

The third theme is "graphite as sculpture," in which artists use graphite and pencils as sculptural material.

Donovan and Friedman have taken pencils as their model to create sculptures.

Their work ranges from a tower of pencils to a three-dimensional model of a city made of pencils to a continuous pencil shaving tacked to the wall.

As befitting the graphite theme, the exhibition has a distinctive black and white tone, Ferrell said.

"This is not so much about color but about form and light," she said.

To tie-in with the exhibition, the Art Center is planning several spring and summer art classes for children and adults. Most classes will focus on drawing, which Ferrell said is less intimidating to prospective students than classes in painting or sculpture.

"We all start out drawing and doodling as kids, but we don't always consider it to be a higher form of art," she said. "But drawing is something that frees you up to be intuitive and to experiment.

"As humans, we all want to make our mark. Through this exhibition, these artists are showing us how many different ways there are to do it."

THE EXHIBITION

* **WHAT:** "Leaded: The Materiality and Metamorphosis of Graphite," featuring the works of 16 contemporary artists who utilize graphite in their work.

* **WHEN:** Opens Thursday through Aug. 10.

* **WHERE:** Salina Art Center, 242 S. Santa Fe.

Opening reception will be from 5-7 p.m. Thursday at the Salina Art Center, with opening remarks at 5:30 p.m. by Heather Ferrell, Salina Art Center executive director and curator.

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