Museum displays COVID-19 commemorative quilt

By MaryRose Denton

Back in March of 2020, just as the coronavirus pandemic shuttered businesses, isolated families and caused a run on toilet paper, something else a little quieter was taking shape.

A group of 16 quilters from around Washington state began sewing, at home, alone. They were brought together by Stanwood resident Denise Long's vision to create a quilt and visual story of life during this challenging time. She called it "The COVID Commemorative Quilt: piecing life together during the pandemic of 2020."

The finished quilt is on display at the Pacific Northwest Quilt & Fiber Arts Museum in La Conner.

The quilt's inception, for Long, was similar to the AIDS quilt designed during that 1980s epidemic as a memorial to those who died of the disease. She conceived the project as a visual representation of life during the pandemic, offering a message of hope and how people managed for future generations to view. "Quilts are visual art, representing what happened at a time in history," Long explained.

Long started gathering ideas and fashioning blocks when she heard about a project the Washington State Historical Society was launching. They were looking for contributions to a COVID-19 collection of memorabilia. Long wasted no time becoming the first to apply.

She began designing more blocks and recruited friends and quilters. Several of the quilters she connected with through the Pacific Northwest Quilters group on Facebook live in different parts of the state: Vancouver, eastern Washington and two quilters came from La Conner: Simme Bobrosky and Ester Woods.

Even though each quilter worked at home, alone during months of the pandemic, this project kept all of them feeling connected to a community as well as to something bigger, something which will always have meaning.

The quilt's design is of four columns, each depicting an aspect of the pandemic life. Column one shows various supplies needed like groceries, column two displays the essential workers and the other columns depict staying healthy, with pictures of masks and hand sanitizer and, finally, problems needing solving, such as creating a vaccine.

By Claire Swedberg

At i.e. in Edison through April 25

Some Northwest artists have

recently learned fairly new tech-

niques to express the changing

forms in nature. That means

sculptors were painting, painters

were sculpting and other new

techniques were at work to ex-

press Earth's ancient patterns.

The results are on display at the

latest art show at Edison's i.e.

Allen Moe, Michael Clough

and James Brems have all taken

on a new – or relatively new – me-

dium for their latest work. Sculp-

tor Moe is displaying a series of oil drop paintings. Clough, tradi-

tionally a painter, has completed a

collection of carved stones while

James Brems – painter and wood

carver -- is distilling his work to

the simplicity of transfer draw-

For more than a year Mar-

gy Lavelle, i.e. Gallery owner,

has been planning the exhibit,

sparked by a visit to Michael

Clough's studio in Anacortes. She

was surprised to see rock sculp-

tures there. "I was blow away by

them," she said. "His work was

astounding, and he had never

worked with that medium. This

was a big surprise." Clough was

using carving to study the tran-

sitory nature of the environment

over millennia, through the lines

Lavelle then spoke with two

and shapes of rock.

Gallery through April 25.



A QUILT WITH A STORY, JUST LIKE IN THE OLD DAYS - "The COVID Commemorative Quilt: piecing life together during the pandemic of 2020" covers a bit of Washington state's coronavirus year. This group project has 16 contributors, including Simme Bobrosky and Ester Woods from La Conner. Stanwood resident Denise Long's vision, made real, will hang in the Pacific Northwest Quilt & Fiber Arts Museum - Photo courtesy of Michael Wooten through May.

Woods sewed the block titled, "6 feet apart," reflecting a vital way we all could help each other remain safe and healthy. There is even a block for the toilet paper

Long sent all the quilters a pattern for their blocks, similar to a black and white coloring book page. She included a square of white fabric with the pattern, which helped maintain unity to the overall design. The sewers set to work, either embroidering their square or employing appliqué.

But the meaning behind the quilt does not stop with the blocks. Long specifically chose fabric scraps donated from Days for Girls to create the borders, edging and backing of the quilt. These scraps were leftover material from the 10,000 masks Days for Girls sewed during the pandemic and distributed to first re-

Artists taking on new mediums in natural study

sponders and essential health care workers.

What began in March came to fruition that August, a five-month endeavor and labor of love. Long collected the completed blocks and put the finishing touches to the quilt. "Being creative during this stay-at-home period helped us stay sane. It also helped us to do something for the world", says Long. "It's a historical testimony. We made it through and we created something beautiful".

The quilt can be seen displayed in the library of the Museum through May. It will then make its way down to the Washington State Historical Museum in Tacoma, where it will become part of their permanent collection.

Tickets to the Museum are \$7. Hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Wednesday-Sunday. Bring the whole family!

Whitmore . . .

until released in New York for-

The two Pacific northwest species of hemlocks are widespread growing from sea level to the tree line. On the east coast there are few conifers, Whitmore says. Hemlocks are a foundational species forming an irreplaceable habitat, critical for a myriad of species to survive: migrating birds, mammal in winter, trout needing cool water and they are an iconic landscape.

Success is not certain. As an invasive species, HWA, populations grow unchecked. In the Great Smokey Mountain National Park, 10 years after HWA invaded, all hemlocks not treated with insecticides were dead. Whitmore repeated "countless millions of trees have died" more than once.

The U.S. Forest Service started a program of implementing

(Continued from Page 1)

biological controls in the 1990s. It is part of long term management strategy. Whitmore notes that "there is not a whole lot of success with biological control. That's the hard part. Trees are long living organisms. They spread across the landscape." Yet forests cover such huge acreages that chemicals are not a solution.

"We are seeing results, but a smashing success has yet to be seen," he reflected. "If you don't hope you don't get anywhere. If you don't hope what do you get?"







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more artists undertaking their them," he says, they may have own new approach to their art that seemed to harken back to the long, patient nature of evolution. Allen Moe, who – like Clough lives off the grid on the Skagit River, has built a body of work and reputation as a ceramicist. Moe was also experimenting in a new medium: paint. Seattle artist James Brems, in the meantime, was reinventing his own work, due to a flooded basement that had damaged his previous work and studio. So Brems was starting again by creating transfer drawings - many in the spirit of petroglyph drawings of more ancient

Clough and Moe showed their work together 30 years ago in the Edison Eye, the same site as that

of the i.e. Gallery today. Some exhibits seem to bring themselves together without heavy-handed planning, Lavelle says, and that was the case with

Clough's rock carvings began about two years ago. He had found rocks that were ancient tools carved by human hands probably for use by indigenous fishermen and hunters. He found himself watching for signs of carved stone on beaches, "and I thought they were beautiful, I thought it's not just a piece of stone they picked up and pounded, they probably carried it with been prized possessions.

So Clough started carving rocks too, with a focus on art: to coax out a natural shape within, not to make something new but to bring out the natural shapes of the rock and its history. Clough does not work with power tools or heavy equipment like chisels. So for his project he used sandpaper and files. When standard files could not penetrate the hardest rock he moved to a diamond file. His sculptures explore the innate lines of the stone. "I following patterns in the rock and they take shape," he says.

Clough is attracted the ancient history of the stones. Their shapes result from tumbling down rivers, into the ocean, smashing around on beaches, grounding down to sand, in some cases being pressed into new stone. As a carver he spent time sitting and staring at the rock before him for hours. For Clough, his time alone with each rock is a story of natural history. "It's gotten me interested in geology," he says.

Brems made his own change in medium out of necessity. The Seattle artist is known for large carvings, simple shapes and color. When his body of work was damaged in a flooded basement, he found a new way for artistic expression by using oil transfer drawings on mulberry paper. It challenged him, according to his artist's statement, with the unpredictability of oil on the line thickness and weight. As it settled into the paper, the oil made detours that he says led to both interesting and unpredictable results. His work speaks of another time in human history, with petroglyph style imagery.

Moe, long known for his clay and other ceramics work, has turned to oil paint. But he is never confined by tradition, and he found his own way to apply paint, letting nature help guide the work.

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