

Non-Binary Exhibit “An Iris Stands Tall”

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For a parent, processing a child’s gender transition can be an emotional journey. The Corvallis Arts Center hosts Annette Sabater’s exhibit, “An Iris Stands Tall” running April 23, through June 14. The exhibit chronicles a mother’s journey as her daughter transitions. Gender identity, discovery, and love are among the themes explored by the artist.

“This is such a loving show,” explained Arts Center curator Hester Coucke. “The art feels contemporary yet has a strong narrative and really tells a story.”

Sabater describes her daughter’s transition as her inspiration, starting in early childhood through adulthood. Although Sabater’s daughter transitioned at the age of 16, the parents both noticed the possibility

much earlier. The work chronicles the range of emotions experienced, including uncertainty, doubt, joy, and love.

“I had to look into myself fully, listen to her, and re-visit how I parented her during her younger life to move towards full acceptance of her transition,” said Sabater. “My artwork was my own private exploration, but as it developed I was encouraged by others.”

Sabater’s process involved extensive research and exploration. Over a two-year period, she created pieces of art with narratives describing their context. She explained that she hopes the exhibit will help others understand the journey shared between a transgender child and their family.

According to Coucke, the Arts Center selected “An Iris Stands Tall” both for the quality of the art and the social relevance of the topic. She explained that gender identity and fluidity are human experiences that used to be kept under the surface, and art can make a contribution in inspiring conversations and building understanding.

“Art is no longer just for art’s sake,” said Coucke, “Most of the time it does something for us. It can shake you up, calm you down, or slow you down so you can think about something in a new way.”

Coucke noted an appreciation for the artist’s use of color to express mood and to tell the story about the artist’s journey. Some of the work uses saturated colors while other pieces are in graphite gray tones.

“I always strive to use color, line, and composition to evoke the mood and message I wish to express. I usually start with my concept of the mood, feeling, or message,” said Sabater. “I use color to convey a variety of emotions or symbolism.”



Sabater further explained her process. She first develops the composition using a graphite pencil often working with negative space. As the piece unfolds she decides whether it will be in full color or remain graphite.

She explained, “I also complete pictures just with graphite or charcoal. I believe this helps guide the viewer to connect to the humanity and vulnerability of the subject or message.”

She emphasizes the subject’s hands, feet, and eyes to give a sense of the “shared humanity” between the subject and the viewer.

According to Sabater, audience reception was primarily positive but often emotional. “An Iris Stands Tall” previously appeared at other galleries including the Cerimon House and the Multnomah Arts Center.

“It has opened the door for others to share their experiences,” said Sabater. “I am humbled to see that my exhibit and story has touched the hearts of many who view it.”

Since the subject matter involves the evolution of her feelings about her daughter’s transition, she always sought to protect her daughter’s privacy.

“I had long conversations with my daughter to make sure she was OK with me sharing this story,” said Sabater. “She supports my art endeavors and is happy that I can use my art to bring a new perspective to help others understand transgender individuals. I honor her privacy by not including her name and I do not discuss her private life with others.”

Sabater will be available at the Arts Center during the Corvallis Arts Walk (CAW) on May 16, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

“An Iris Stand Tall” is hosted by the Arts Center, 700 SW Madison Avenue in Corvallis from April 23, through June 14. The Arts Center also is hosting “Plus Voices” featuring local artists selected by guest curator Rosalie Lingo May 3, through June 1. This Corinne Woodman Gallery exhibit features work by local artists exploring topics surrounding gender identity. These artists include Erica Graves, Doug Hatano, Carmen McCormick, and Ceph Poklemba.

The Arts Center will partner with The Corvallis Advocate for a panel discussion on May 30, at 6:30 p.m. Check The Arts Center website www.theartcenter.net (<http://www.theartcenter.net>) for details on these and other associated events.

by Samantha Sied