

The virtues of community are touted in a series of performance art parties

BY REGINA HACKETT
P-I art critic

English novelist E.M. Forster is best known for his two-word directive, "Only connect." It was advice he was unable to follow, which makes his idea a little preposterous. But if he were born again into the contemporary world and found himself capable of pushing past the constraints of his nature, he might find much to appreciate in the visual art activities at Bumbershoot.

Good intentions prevail at a series of performance art parties in the making, all of which are intended to draw you — yes, you — out of your shell.

Ironically, none of these shows about the virtues of community offers the Seattle artist community what it used to have at Bumbershoot, a place to gather and recognize its own. Formerly, there was at least one big exhibit, usually on a theme, that gave a broad range of artists a chance to participate with peers around the country and even the globe.

The art was the art, and the audience the audience. Art was not a lesson to be learned but an experience to be absorbed, rejected or ignored at the pleasure of the individual.

Today, an air of kumbaya hangs over the visual art enterprises in the Northwest Rooms, a clap-your-hands hope that viewers become participants and participants emerge as better people.

If Bumbershoot is this intent on community, where's the party? Until last year, the art exhibits hosted a party the night before the admission charge kicked in.

"Things change," said Michele Scoleri, executive director of the festival and head of programming. "It's not just OK, but necessary for the survival of the festival."

Why no party?
"Bumbershoot is the party," she said. Told that the larger visual art community is not thrilled, she said, "If someone chooses to exclude themselves, there's nothing we can do about that. We look at all proposals. Our phone lines are open."

It isn't the party that matters most. It's the philosophical shift to art that's good for you. But what's true today may not be true next year. Things do change, and they can change back. In the meantime, there are opportunities to improve ourselves.

"The Power of One"

Curator Marita Holdaway features artists who want the world to be a better place. They photograph others with gauzy sympathy (Phil Borges), or journalistic clarity (Nina Berman, Katarina Mouratidi and Jackie Renn).

"If two or three people see this exhibit and realize they can make a difference, I'll consider it a success," said Holdaway.

Not only are there portraits of people around the world, there are tables in the rear with literature from progressive organizations.

The most interesting is Enough Fear. It is sponsoring the Red Phone project, which allows people in Seattle to pick up the phone and have a heart-to-heart with people in Iran,



KATHARINA MOURATIDI

Katarina Mouratidi's photo mural of Nawal El Saadawi, an Egyptian feminist writer and psychiatrist, is one of 50 hung around Seattle Center's Northwest Court during Bumbershoot. Mouratidi's book, "The Other Globalisation," is about activists of social and political movements around the world.

Not too many heart-to-hearts, however. There are only two phones.

"Seattle-Tehran Poster Show"

Daniel R. Smith chose the illustrators from Seattle, and Iman Raad of Iran chose them from his country. The exchange on the level of graphic signs and symbols is fascinating. Remember when the term illustration was an insult? Illustrators rule.

"Grand Openings"

Curated by Sara Krajewski and Betsy Brock from the Henry Art Gallery, "Grand Openings" features the five-members of New York multimedia group of that name. Brock is responsible for a mini-party to be held Friday night, 5-8, the free admission night, in which all the visual art exhibits will be open, and cookies and lemonade will be served in Grand Openings.

"At least it's something," said Brock. Her show could be lots of fun. Grand Openings is a boundary-blurring, improvisatory team rooted in lithe lyricism and a commitment to be inclusive. Stop by and participate. Why not? The days will be freewheeling, with blocks of time set aside for unpredictable music, dance and theatrical experiences. The must-see event is Sunday night, 6-7:30.

"One Pot"

I have highest hopes for Michael Hebbroy's tribute to the late-1960s era of passionate engagement, explored through food, conversation and video. Says Hebbroy — who also goes by Michael Hebb: "The Bumbershoot public, along with festival artists, musicians and writers, are invited to the prep kitchen and 40-foot table in the Shaw Room to participate. The walls of the gallery will be filled with film footage from One Pot happen-

ings in Paris, Rome, New York, Chicago and Mexico City — all commissioned to incite a global conversation."

"Drawing Jam"

Anybody can whistle, right? And anybody can draw: The Gage Academy of Art's "Drawing Jam" is a taste of old-fashioned art school, with models, free art supplies and easels. Gage artistic director and painter Gary Faigin presides with various other artists, all highly skilled, spelled by celebrity appearances.

Out and about

There's a choice group of artists out and about throughout the festival. Musician Paul Rucker takes his sketch-and-scribble instrument to the Northwest Court, Vaughn Bell and her ecofriendly if faintly absurd "Cultivation Utility Vehicle" shows you how to go green on the Exhibition Hall lawn, and Jasmine Zimmerman's recycled plastic "Bottle House," also on the Exhibition Hall lawn, turns trash into an unlikely seedbed.

AccorDance is doing "FountainWorks," at (where else?) the fountain; Byron Au Yong's "Kidnapping Water: Bottled Operas" is at the DuPen Fountain; Amy-Ellen Trefsgjer's "Inquiries for an Artist Who Doesn't Draw or Paint" is in the lobby of the Northwest Court; Erin Shafkind's "Little Roy" and dancers from Melbourne's "Strange Fruit" company are both on the grounds; and Katarina Mouratidi's large portraits of activists from around the world, "The Other Globalisation," are hanging around the Northwest Court.

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