

Coeur d'Alene Press, The (ID)

Artistic collaboration

Human Rights Education Institute exhibit relied on nature for materials

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Published: March 6, 2008

COEUR d'ALENE — The artists who created the pieces for the **Human Rights Education** Institute's newest exhibit did it at the mercy of Mother Nature. Using nothing more than what was available in the wilderness, Rachel Dolezal and Dave Govedare created works that reflect on both the sustainability and fragile nature of our planet.

"We had extreme limitations. Living within limits was pushed to the hilt. The first two installations were done in blizzard conditions. It was kind of like extreme reality TV," said Dolezal, visual director for the Coeur d'Alene institute.

Entitled "Living within Limits: A Collaboration with Nature," the exhibit will be unveiled tonight during a free public reception starting at 6 p.m.

It features images of the artists' works, taken by Coeur d'Alene photographer Shawn Gust, rather than the pieces themselves.

"All the work has been given back to nature," Dolezal said.

Dolezal said the institute's committee designed the program to focus on the environment and **human rights** and where the two intersect.

"I think a good definition of sustainability could perhaps be an individual or a group of individuals giving back as much as they take from the environment," Dolezal said.

That's where environmental concerns cross over into **human rights** issues, because everyone has the **right** to clean air and water, including future generations and those living in other countries, she said.

Dolezal hopes viewing the project does for others what it did for her — forced her to look at the environmental impacts of her actions.

"Is it sustainable for artists to be using toxic paints and oils?" Dolezal said.

Dolezal, a mixed media artist and instructor at North Idaho College, and Dave Govedare, a Chewelah metal sculptor and creator of the feather sculpture on Northwest Boulevard and the wild ponies overlooking the Columbia River Gorge in Vantage, Wash., spent weekends during the month of February working on the project.

"The wind, the weather and the materials really compose and impact the work just as much as **human** hands," Dolezal said.

The production took place at The Nature Conservancy's 88-acre Cougar Bay Preserve on the northwest shore of Lake Coeur d'Alene.

Dolezal hopes the images will be so compelling that people will visit the preserve. She said they had some very curious hikers watch them as they worked.

Working without man-made tools, they used rocks, sticks and sometimes even teeth.

With marsh, meadow and mountain as their canvas, the artists used whatever materials they could find: grass, lichen, red bark, fallen trees and sticks that had partially decayed.

Dolezal created a leaf curtain using leaves that had been under the snow since fall.

"They were stripped down to their very last breath as a leaf, a transparent khaki-color, with a glimmer of yellow rust. I felt like I was weaving fabric or something," she said.

The artists met with Frank SiJohn, an elder from the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, to help them understand the Tribe's perspective and the historical significance of the preserve site.

A five-person crew participated in the project including two assistants and the photographer.

One of the assistants, Charles Miller, an instructor at NIC, was there to not only help gather materials but to get a sense of the project so he could write guitar music.

The music will accompany a DVD that shows the production of all the pieces. The DVD will be available for purchase at tonight's reception and throughout the run of the exhibit, slated to run through April.

The other assistant was Ron McCoy from Chewelah.

"The assistants get a lot of credit. I would say, 'I'm seeing lime-green lichen going with this particular competition.' They would just disappear and come back with it," Dolezal said.

Dolezal wrote the proposal for the project sponsored by the Margaret Walker Reed Foundation and the **Human Rights Education** Institute.

School groups will be touring the exhibit after spring break through the month of April.

A panel discussion with city and county officials is slated at the end of the exhibit featuring talks on sustainability.

Information: 292-2359

Courtesy of Shawn Gust Artist Dave Govedare stands next to one of the productions he created for the **Human Rights Education** Institute's new exhibit, "Living within Limits: A Collaboration with Nature."

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