

Spirituality in different forms

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Lilly, by Kopriva, is on display in her "Gothic Green" exhibit at the Nave Museum. The piece, made in 2009, is papier-mache, plaster and mixed media.

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A large wooden sculpture of a Roman Catholic confessional grabs the eye when stepping into the Nave Museum.

Its booth is made of three compartments - two rooms for penitents and one in the center for a priest.

Behind a sheer curtain and under the glow of a daunting light, skeletal creatures kneel and appear to be whispering into a lattice.

This is one of the pieces in Sharon Kopriva's "Gothic Green" exhibit. The Nave had its member preview Nov. 12, when Kopriva revealed her work.

The Houston artist showcases the evolution of her artwork during a period of 30 years.

"It's a wide range of years, so the pieces looks so different," she said. "I grew up Catholic, so in my early years that's what I mostly did, and then I experienced different things, went to different places, so it changed."

Kopriva said her early work reflected her perception of the Catholic church as a small child.

She said she often felt an unsettling fear when walking into the chapel and confessional.

"I just remember a dark, but rich church," Kopriva said. "It's not a negative thing; it's just a memory. That's why I have those creatures: they aren't supposed to be scary, but old relics of the church."

Many religious-inspired pieces fill the space surrounding the confessional, including a paper mache life-sized cardinal dressed in a traditional red choir dress.

Across the room from the Catholic motif is an entirely different subject matter, including mixed-media works of lush, green forests hang on the walls.

Kopriva said she created the art only a few years ago, inspired by her daily walks in the woods of Idaho.

"I remember I would see these large magnificent trees bending into each other, shaping an arc," she said. "I want people to feel like they are being swallowed by real leaves and branches."

Many of her green art pieces consist of real branches and leaves projecting from the canvas onto the museum's floor.

Victoria resident Al Ledesma attended the member preview and said the forestry section of the exhibit was his favorite.

"It reminds me of when I went to the jungles of Panama," he said. "I went over there for my work, and I remember the branches would curve like that. The only thing is they wouldn't let the sun in. It was pitch black."

In the back gallery of the Nave, yet another theme surfaces, the works captivate the artist's three Peruvian hairless dogs.

"These also deal with spirituality, and you can see the arc shapes here too," she said. "But each tells a different story."

One of the pieces, "Spirits of Sivriada," illustrates dogs hovering over a yard of bones.

"In 1910, Turkey decided they had too many stray dogs," she said. "They gathered them and took them to an island where they let them perish. That's what this represents."

John Moriada, who co-curated the exhibit with Sharon Steen, said bringing Kopriva to the Nave has been in the works for several years.

"This is really her journey through artwork," he said. "She doesn't do just one thing; she thinks outside of the box. As you can see, she's always coming up with new ideas."

Although Kopriva's pieces differ from wall to wall, Moriada said they share some of the same elements.

"I think if you really look at all her artwork it has kind of a similar feel," he said. "From the Catholic church to the dogs to even out of the woods, you look at all the work and you get a sense of spirituality."



Chris Davies, of Houston, looks over a collection of Sharon Kopriva's art exhibit, "Gothic Green," during the opening reception Nov. 13 at the Nave Museum. Among her pieces, one titled "Canis Major," is seen left.
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Sharon Kopriva stands to the applause of the crowd to talk about her artwork during the opening reception of her exhibit, "GothGreen," on Nov. 13 at the Nave Museum. The exhibit will be on display at the museum until Dec. 21.
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The Confessional, by Sharon Kopriva, is on display at the Nave Museum along with other pieces of art that spans a 30-year journey and her search for spirituality, including a Catholic upbringing.
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Audie Shields, left, and Richard Wisler, right, both of Victoria, talk as they sit among Sharon Kopriva's artwork from her exhibition 'Catholic Teen', on Nov. 3 at the Nave Museum.
Among her works is a piece called 'The Cardinal', seen left.
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