

## Tiny galleries hold big surprises

**Five birdhouse-like boxes in Manzanita prove that good things do indeed come in small packages**

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*The “Tuscan Green Library” gallery at the Hoffman Center for the Arts imagines a tiny library filled with books and poetry. Art includes paintings by Pam Greene and William Walob; raku vases by Chris Biegun; poetry by Emily Randell; jar by Mary Roberts; and mini books representing Hoffman publications (20 by 20 by 20 inches, all-weather plywood with cedar shake roof, Plexiglas window).*

Sometimes you just have to be the smaller person — as landscape artist Pam Greene discovered recently when she set out to create paintings for the Hoffman Center for the Arts’ Tiny Gallery event in Manzanita.

“Imagining myself as a tiny person, standing in a very tiny person’s shoes, next to a painting of an enormous Sitka trunk with a vista to the ocean, gave me a sense of pure exhilaration,” said Greene, who is known for her large-scale paintings.

The Hoffman Center is featuring five outdoor galleries, four in the Wonder Garden and one outside the center, with eight artists and one poet displaying work. Each gallery consists of a box, most of them 22 by 17 by 15 inches, with a roof and Plexiglas front door, containing the miniature artworks. The galleries will be sold through a fundraising raffle with tickets available, at \$10 each, through July 31.

The tiny galleries are part of a nationwide trend that grew out of the limitations of life in the pandemic, said Janice Slonecker Berman, a member of the center’s board of directors.

Slonecker Berman said the event was inspired by Stacy Milrany’s Free Little Art Gallery (FLAG) in Seattle. Milrany calls her box of a gallery, mounted on a post, the “smallest, free-est gallery in the galaxy,” where people are invited to “take a piece, or leave a piece or both.” Slonecker Berman said the Hoffman Center tweaked the idea to represent local artists and disciplines.

Milrany wasn’t the first to open a “petite arts gallery,” noted a recent story in Smithsonian Magazine. Earlier galleries could be found in Edmonton, Canada, and Austin, Texas, but the trend “has gained traction in large part thanks to her Seattle FLAG, which debuted in December 2020.” Tiny galleries now can be found across the country from San Francisco to Atlanta to Washington, D.C. — and the Oregon Coast.

In Manzanita, artists representing the Hoffman Center’s visual arts, clay, and writing programs were asked to create art related to the area. Not surprisingly, the subjects are very “beachy,” said Bonnie Laing-Malcolmson, also on the center’s board of directors and retired Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Northwest Art for the Portland Art Museum.

On display free of charge since July 2, the galleries have proven to be one more coastal subject prompting visitors to reach for their cameras. Tiny art, it seems, is a powerful draw for all sizes.

“I think it’s so fascinating to see anything that is somewhat out of the ordinary and something that is a surprise,” said Laing-Malcolmson. “When you look into these tiny galleries, the quality is marvelous. You can imagine them being huge. They look like they could be 8 by 10 feet or bigger, and yet they are minuscule.”

The largest piece is 6 by 6 inches. The galleries, each painted a different color and named accordingly for easy identification, feature paintings, ceramics, and in one, poetry and books.



*Work in the “Glowing Goldenrod” gallery includes raku by Chris Biegun; paintings by Pam Greene and Lloyd Lindley; and a watercolor by Dorota Haber-Lehigh (22 by 17 by 15 inches, spruce with southern yellow pine roof; Plexiglas window).*



*The "Sage Green" gallery holds a red cat painting by Susan Walsh; Short Sand Beach watercolor by Dorota Haber-Lehigh; watercolors by Tammy Litwinchuk; and ceramic sculptures by Mary Roberts (22 by 17 by 15 inches, spruce with southern yellow pine roof; Plexiglas window).*

"The tiny painting format stretched me creatively," said Greene, whose paintings of trees against coastal sunsets are in three of the galleries. "I didn't want to shrink the type of coastal scene I might paint if I had a large canvas. Due to the small size, I needed to eliminate the details and create strong focus. As a result, the piece shows the distant ocean as a simple glowing color field in the background with the Sitka trunks captured in dark silhouette midway up."

The paintings, vases, and other pieces were created as separate works, then organized in the boxes, which resemble large bird houses. Laing-Malcolmson compared it to hanging a group show.

"You curate it. You look at the artwork and say, this would work with this, and put it together. It was really carefully curated to be good and strong and powerful. Each gallery really looks like a small, actual gallery space." Or, she says, what you might hang in your house "if you were an art collector and designed the way you collect. The quality of the individual small pieces of art is very high."

Prior to creating the paintings for the event, Greene's exposure to tiny art included Joseph Cornell's boxes at MoMA in New York, the hand-painted snuff bottles at the Seattle Asian Art Museum and, though she didn't always see it as such,

her father's hobby.

"Everyone loves looking at architectural models of buildings and cities," she said. "My dad had model trains and built a track that ran through miniature landscapes and villages. I never thought of those as art, but they probably helped exercise my imagination. I think imagining oneself very small is creatively powerful, and universally enjoyed."

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