

Unique 'Avianto' exhibit explores endangered birds & human languages

By Bethany Anne Putnam

Much has been written about Lakeside artist Deborah Kruger. A documentary on her website (deborahkruger.com) explains her work in great detail. The list of her previous exhibitions is long and impressive. The honors, grants, biennials and residencies are varied and span the globe.

When reflecting on her retirement and settling down in Mexico, Kruger focuses on her vision for the future, saying she positioned herself "for life as an international installation artist."

She has definitely accomplished that goal, and her work continues to have an impact—sought out by galleries, festivals and art consortiums. She was just awarded the Arte Laguna Prize and her work will be shown in Venice, Italy, in March and April of next year.

Kruger cares deeply for our planet and its inhabitants. The cycle that is foremost in her consciousness follows this trajectory: climate change and industrialization encroach upon natural habitats and migration patterns. Animals and especially birds become disturbed, endangered and eventually extinct. The same is true for humans, she believes. When cultures and indigenous communities are displaced and uprooted, their traditions, generations of artistry and their ancient languages are exterminated. The loss of birds and loss of languages fill her thoughts and run through her work.

"Avianto," the exhibit currently showing at the Centro Cultural Gonzalez Gallo in Chapala, is a fascinating combination of past, present and future studies on the subject. Feathers are the outward and visible manifestation of her inner contemplations. They are constructed from recycled plastic bags that are fused together and then screen-printed with complementary patterns. A paragraph of text has been translated into 17 extinct languages and overlaps with contrasting images of bird species that, sadly, have disappeared from our planet. This collection



of work takes the shape of large wall murals, smaller framed pieces and a study on traditional Mexican ceramics adorned with colorful fringe.

True to her commitment to the environment, everything has purpose and meaning, and leftover fragments are thoughtfully incorporated into future sculptures.

In addition to being an activist artist, Kruger is committed to the women of Mexico. Five local women contribute to the fusing of plastic, layered screen-printing, decorative and structural sewing, formation of feathers and eventual placement within a sculpture or hanging. Five days a week, her studio assistants work collaboratively with Kruger, to create the necessary materials.

Her bright and incredibly organized atelier is perched above her home and I can imagine the generously spaced workstations being occupied by lively women who laugh and talk and share their stories with each other. Kruger has watched them grow in confidence and encourages them to learn new aspects of the process. She is intimately involved in their lives as an extended family member and is thrilled that her creative leadership can affect generational transitions.

Exposure to the arts and a female-owned and operated business is both a conscious and unconscious influence and a game-changer for her valued crew. Inviting her assistants and their families to the exhibition opening brings Kruger great joy. She says her work provides income and purpose for these women and knows that steady employment is shifting the bal-

ance in their lives. "It is all for them," she says.

Kruger has kept the needs of the viewer in mind when developing her media presence. Her posts are attention grabbing, bright, colorful, personal, lively and most importantly they tell her story in dynamic and clever bursts of video and photography. No matter your attention span or choice of visual or written stimulation, she has populated her extensive online representation with both informative and easy-to-absorb creative nuggets. She wants desperately to reach you with her critical messaging and will greet you at whatever format strikes your fancy. The message is most important.

Kruger is a rare talent who successfully combines being a smart businesswoman and prolific creator. She has a strong grasp of social media and the power it holds for marketing yourself, and is willing to share her knowledge. Click on the "Inner Artist" tab on her website and you will find her reflections on her life experience, as well as balanced advice to creatives who need support and encouragement.

Kruger says she tells artists "to consider how to better incorporate their message and content into the form of their work." When their work is "well-marinated," researched and properly expressive, it resonates more clearly with the public, she notes.

Kruger's consistent promotion and innovative marketing accomplishes her goal of illuminating the public to the travesties of loss that are prevalent in nature and human existence. As education and communication are the gateway to critical change, she will be hosting a series of public art conversations about her work and hopes you will watch for them and attend. You will find her art to be so much more detailed than it is possible to write about in one article.

After the pieces stint in Chapala, they will travel around Jalisco, landing in three other museums, the final location being the Government Palace



Deborah Kruger's works have been exhibited in many countries around the world,



Deborah Kruger in her studio



"Avianto," is available for viewing at the Centro Cultural Gonzalez Gallo through September 30.

in Guadalajara. This exhibition, titled "Avianto," is available for viewing at the Centro Cultural Gonzalez Gallo (the old train station in Chapala) through September 30. Open Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sundays, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.