

UPDATE: Former hardware store evolves into art gallery

Jeremy C. Ruark jruark@countrymedia.net | Posted: Wednesday, July 13, 2016 2:00 pm

The scheduled opening of the Portland2016 Biennial of Contemporary Art exhibit at the former Hazen Hardware Store in Clatskanie has been delayed due to illness until next Wednesday, July 20 from noon to 5 p.m.

Previous Chief coverage posted July 13:

A Portland artist is helping transform the former Hazen Hardware Store in Clatskanie into an art gallery.



On Display

Part of the art exhibit at the former hardware store in Clatskanie includes this sculpture.



As part of the Portland2016 Biennial of Contemporary Art, artist Heidi Schwegler is displaying her work at the former hardware store on Nehalem Street.

The Biennial is a project that was launched in 1949 by the Portland Art Museum to give exposure to area artists. The project ended in 2006 but was restarted in 2010 by the nonprofit Disjecta Contemporary Art Center in Portland.

This year, Internationally renowned artist-curator Michelle Grabner selected 34 artists and artist-teams to exhibit at wide-ranging venues from Ashland and Clatskanie to Madras and La Grande between July 9 and September 18. Mirroring the geographic span of the artists — 13 are from outside

Portland — Disjecta’s Biennial will engage sites across Oregon, making the project accessible to larger and more diverse audiences, while also encouraging visitors to travel between and explore host communities, according to Disjecta Executive Director Bryan Suerefh.

“This is the first year we are taking it statewide,” Suerefh said. “All of Oregon should be able to experience it. It is just customer service. It is just celebrating the unique cultural and landscapes that make up Oregon.”

Suerefh said he accidentally discovered the Hazen Hardware Store on his way back to Portland following a visit to Astoria

“I just happen to stop for lunch in Clatskanie and I saw that the Hazen Hardware store across the street was vacant,” he said. “We were looking to activate properties, restart them and bring them back to life. The Hazen building was intriguing.”

Suerefh contacted Schwegler to tell her about the opportunity to set up an exhibit in Clatskanie. Schwegler has exhibited her work in Portland, Ashland, Corvallis, and Eugene, but never in Clatskanie.

“I feel so lucky that I got this hardware store in Clatskanie,” Schwegler said. “Once I got in here and started to clean it out, it’s the perfect spot. Being in such an alternative site means a lot to me. It’s not a white box. It’s not a museum or a gallery, so that allows me to make work that is inspired by the store.”

Schwegler said she ended up producing a mix of new artwork with some of her older work for the Clatskanie exhibit, including several objects that she found left in the former hardware store.

Schwegler’s Biennial exhibit opens from noon to 5 p.m. on Wednesday, July 13 and runs through Sept. 18. An official opening is set from 1 to 4 p.m. on Aug. 13 with people invited from all over the state to attend.

“I am amazed about how many local people have been coming in and have been curious about what’s going on,” she said. “It’s been great. I know the Hazen store means a lot to the people here. I hope I am doing this space justice.”

According to Schwegler, having the Oregon artwork shown in rural areas is an important connector.

“I think it is great for Clatskanie to see work like this,” she said. “This isn’t like classical sculpture. They’ll see humor. They’ll see sadness. There are many layers to this work. Hopefully, it will hit people in Clatskanie in multiple levels.”

Schwegler admits many of the materials she finds for her artwork are trash.

“They are discarded trash that is culturally and socially significant to me,” she said. “I am refocusing the objects. For me that is raw material and I am showing them to you in a different way. I love making something better than what it was.”

Schwegler said her artwork has redefined her as a person.

“I don’t know if I am a street cleaner or an artist,” she said. “I go around and I find things that people hap hazardously discard and I take it home and make it into something beautiful.”

Suerefh said connecting the art to rural areas gives people an opportunity, at no charge, easy access to the arts.

“Even if you hate the arts, you haven’t wasted any money looking at these exhibits,” he said. “Our mission is dedicated to showcasing contemporary art. That is what we get out of it. We hope we are helping the artists and exposing the great dynamic arts of Oregon.

Suerefh said he hopes the Biennial generates national attention.

“Portland has been in the national media for its artwork and this expands that focus to the rest of Oregon,” he said.

Schwegler's Clatskanie exhibit attracted a crew from Oregon Public Broadcasting. As Schwegler unloaded her artwork into the hardware store on Tuesday, July 5, the crew taped a segment for the OPB program, Art Beat.