

Margaret Curtis exhibit opens Tuesday at Florence County Museum

Matthew Robertson Feb 6, 2022



Stephen Motte stands in the first-floor gallery at the Florence Museum where works of Margaret Curtis will be on display through July 3.

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“Blazing Worlds” is one of 11 paintings by North Carolina Artist Margaret Curtis included in an exhibit that opens Tuesday at the Florence County Museum.

FLORENCE, S.C. — The paintings of North Carolina-based artist Margaret Curtis have been called “curious collages of surreal symbolism.” Her images are visually rich and psychologically complex — the result of a challenging lifelong personal and artistic journey — so say the words on the gallery wall at the Florence County Museum.

Curtis' exhibit, [non]fiction, opens Tuesday in the first-floor north gallery at the museum with 11 of her works on loan from private collectors and other museums.

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"She works on a large scale and her works can be anywhere from 4-7 feet wide. Although it's not a lot of works on the wall but a lot to see," said curator Stephen Motte.

"This is 'Blazing Worlds,' " Motte said, referring to the painting of a fire. "This is one of Curtis' more recent paintings. There's a little bit of everything there. It has the presence of a runaway, large and close fires. Fires are a complex thing to look at."

Motte also crafted the words on the walls in the exhibit.

"Curtis has been working for over 30 years and her subject matter is political, personal; it's highly symbolic and borders on the surreal," Motte said. "She is a highly accomplished artist who has been featured in the New York Times, Art in America, Modern Painters and Harpers."

"The works in this exhibition have been created more recently and deal with the topics that have followed her throughout her career," Motte said.

Two of the topics are family dynamics and global warming.

"Although Curtis' narratives are ambiguous and open to interpretation, posing more questions than answers, her work is concerned with power, especially the power dynamics in everyday relationships. In paintings like Ice Sculpture and American Family of Four, Curtis invites a comparison between the effects of narcissism on the family structure to the operation of patriarchal power structures within society at large," Motte wrote for one of the walls.

The paintings are vivid in color, complex in texture and rich in symbolism.

"They can range from examinations of power in relationships and politics, climate change, you name it. There's a lot of content here and something for everyone to appreciate," Motte said.



"I think that at first, these images are clearly complex and I think that draws the viewer in and they can see that, although the images are rendered realistically, representationally, they are very dreamlike," Motte said. "The imagery is very symbolic, sometimes controversial. Sometimes there is implied violence and some viewers might withdraw from that."

"Unless you get up close to the paintings you're not going to realize a lot of what makes them special. The way the paint is applied, the heavy texture. They really invite closer inspection," Motte said. "It has been called surrealistic. I think for Margaret Curtis it is less about that and more about communicating complex ideas."

"We have her booked for a speaking engagement in June. I think we will have a reception event for her but we're still making those decisions," Motte said.

The exhibit run through July 3.