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An eye for 'Details'

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The Salem Conference Center's first art exhibit puts the focus on downtown

It's all in the details when it comes to the Salem Conference Center, and "The Details Show" is appropriately the first art exhibit at the center, which opened in 2005.

"The Details Show," which showed in May at the Mary Lou Zeek Gallery, has been remounted for its new setting and opened two weeks ago.

The show by local photographer Kelly James features photographic details of downtown Salem, with the viewer is invited to figure out where the images were taken.

"We've always wanted to do the artwork, but with the budget restraints, we had to wait," center general manager Chrissie Bertsch said.

"We're excited. We think it's a great start to have someone like Kelly James and the Salem theme.

"My hunch is it's a pretty good place to start."

The show, which will be up for several months, is installed in the gallery along Ferry Street SE and is visible from inside and outside the building.

The photos are mounted in front of the windows on hollow-core doors, suspended from the ceiling by chains, with the art on both sides of the doors.

The exhibit will coincide with some changes in the conference center galleries that line Commercial and Ferry streets and the second level foyer facing Commercial Street.

Bertsch said the center is installing new tile-type carpet next month on the exposed concrete floor for a warmer look and muted acoustics. The colors will be a deep taupe/steel gray color with circular patterns.

In case of stains by spilled wine or some other accident, individual tiles can be replaced.

Seating modules with clusters of chairs and benches also will be installed in the galleries within the next six to eight weeks.

The color scheme will be rust and taupe leather, with rustic color accents.

Zeek said she approached the conference center about getting art installed, which has been a goal since before the center opened.

"Our goal was to get people who drive through town to drive by and see we've finally got art in the conference center," she said.

"It really looks good."

Zeek, who also provided brochures with the exhibit, is trying to keep her name away from the exhibit, although she conceived and organized it.

"It's promoting downtown," she said. "I tried to keep a low profile.

Salem Conference Center

Where: 200 Commercial St. SE

Hours: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Fridays

Admission: Free

Call: (503) 589-1700

"I wanted it to be about downtown."

The big question is what comes next, and ideas have been fielded that include an annual mayor's invitational show, similar to what has happened in Eugene, with a purchase award to buy art for a permanent collection.

The collection in the Salem City Hall was created through a similar process, with the art being juried by a committee of experts.

Such a group was formed for the conference center originally.

"But everybody's just busy," Zeek said. "It's hard for them to come up with a consensus."

"That's a real big hurdle," Bertsch said of the invitational. "That's an idea she's pitched to me.

"I don't think we're quite there yet."

Displaying art is possible in the conference center, even when dealing with rental space and walls that can't take nails, she said.

"I think that we have pretty flexible space," she said. "I think there's a good way to hang stuff.

"I think that it's very feasible to figure out ways to get art in there."

Finding the funding and sponsorship is a concern, Zeek said.

"One of our goals we're working in our proposal, we'd really like to see it start in May," she said.

Zeek is working with Shelley Curtis, the curator and manager of the touring "Art About Agriculture" show for Oregon State University's College of Agriculture.

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