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Evanston artist Connie Noyes processes grief through art

By Myrna Petlicki
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FEEDBACK

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Connie Noyes is both a licensed psychotherapist and a multidisciplinary visual artist so when her husband and father died within days of each other in 2016, she channeled her grief into an art project that drew on both of her talents.

That project, “Connie Noyes: we are built in water,” will be on display in the second floor atrium art gallery at the Evanston Art Center, 1717 Central St. in Evanston, Nov. 12 through Dec. 18.

“Grief is an ocean of tears formed over millennia — a cumulative repository of our collective grief. My current work is an immersion into mourning,” Noyes wrote in her artist’s statement about the exhibit.



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Artist Connie Noyes immerses herself in her work in “Come Stand in the Sun,” an image from the exhibit “Connie Noyes: we are built in water,” at the Evanston Art Center, Nov. 12-Dec. 18. (Connie Noyes) - Original Credit: Handout (Connie Noyes / HANDOUT)

The title of the exhibit refers to the other immersion that is an important factor in our lives.

“If you think about it, we’re inside this sac of water before we’re born,” Noyes explained. The artist, who now lives in Chicago noted that, in addition, “I grew up in San Francisco and the ocean has always been sort of a rejuvenating, transformative entity for me so a lot of the materials and energy that I’m using revolve around water.”

The circle was completed when, following the deaths of her husband and father, their ashes were returned to the sea. Noyes added, “I made a whole list of commonalities between birth and death.”

Visitors to the exhibit will see a 20-foot dining table that Noyes built with place settings at each end made from vintage porcelain plates. “They’re broken and put back together and I’ve painted them with ash,” the artist said. “There’s sea life from the bottom of the ocean in San Francisco that I’ve used as kind of food on the plate.” The table is covered with a tablecloth of black linen fabric.

That piece is called, “dinner for two leftovers.”

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Artist Connie Noyes processes grief in “Connie Noyes: we are built in water,” a one-person exhibit at the Evanston Art Center, Nov. 12-Dec.

18, which includes a table setting on a large dining table called, "dinner for two leftovers." (Connie Noyes) - Original Credit: Handout (Connie Noyes / HANDOUT)

Above the table are over 50 small paintings that Noyes made out of ash.

"They're reminiscent of that Japanese art form called Kintsugi, where you mend what's broken with gold leaf," Noyes explained.

Noyes believes that her artwork is heavily influenced by her work as a psychotherapist, saying, "I think going to school in art therapy made me a better artist." Noyes earned a Master of Arts degree in psychology and art therapy from Notre Dame de Namur University and a Master of Fine Arts degree from the School of the Art Institute.

She also trained as a death doula, someone who assists in the dying process like a midwife assists in the process of birth, and as a grief recovery specialist to help her process the losses of her husband and father.

The Noyes exhibit was already scheduled when Audrey Avril became Manager of Exhibitions at the Evanston Art Center. She soon understood why Noyes was chosen for a one-person show.

Avril reported that during her visit to Noyes' studio when they were planning the particulars of the exhibit, "I was amazed by the breadth of her work."

Avril said that there will also be a video component to the exhibit, "which is going to add to this meditative visual and audio environment that visitors will be able to enter into and explore."

The title of the exhibit is appropriate, Avril said, because "there's a lot of found objects that are associated

with the sea. It also goes along with the idea of this deep well of sadness and grieving emotions that we experience throughout our lives.”

“This is the first time anybody has seen this work that I started six years ago,” Noyes revealed. “It’s very, very different than anything I’ve ever done in the past.”

There will be an opening reception for the exhibit 5-8 p.m. on Nov. 11.

Two events are planned in conjunction with the exhibit.

During “Mending Ruptures,” 2-4 p.m. Dec. 4, participants will be invited to bring pieces of cloth in order to help the artist mend a large quilt-type piece that she created that keeps breaking apart.

On Dec. 11, from 2-4 p.m., Noyes will participate “In Conversation with Tricia Van Eck,” who is the artistic director of an art space that challenges the definition of art.

For more details, call 847-475-5300 or visit evanstonartcenter.org/exhibitions/connie-noyes.

Myrna Petlicki is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.

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