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OREGON'S MID-WILLAMETTE VALLEY



An untitled weaving by Judith Poxson Fawkes has been cleaned and reinstalled in Hearing Room D at the state Capitol. Frank Miller | Special to the Statesman Journal / DANIELLE PETERSON | Statesman Journal

Capitol art returns

Cleaned, repaired and rearranged, the collection is now ready to be shown off



Written by [Barbara Curtin](#)

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There's a reunion of sorts taking place at the state Capitol as 170 paintings, sculptures, photographs and other pieces return after a three-year absence. If you didn't miss them, you aren't alone. Over three decades, some

of the works wound up in storage. Others were displayed so unobtrusively that Oregon masterworks became less familiar to the public than an oddity displayed in the lobby: a state seal crafted from stuff found in Portland's sewer pipes.

Now the Capitol Art Collection has been cleaned, catalogued and repaired. With the advice of a professional museum curator, the works have been redeployed to show off what Oregonians own: art now valued at \$900,000.

"It's a luscious collection; it's so well represented," said Frankie Bell, who spent more than 31 years as visitor services manager at the Capitol. She was part of the committee that oversaw the restoration project.

The Capitol Art Collection harks back to a time when Oregon had money and taste to spare. In 1975, as the state geared up to

build wings on each side of the existing Capitol, the Legislature passed a law that 1 percent of construction dollars for state building would go to acquire artwork.

A selection jury, with help from the local arts community, bought pieces that they felt represented the vibrant Northwest arts scene of that time.

Fast forward to 2007-08, when the Capitol wings underwent a major renovation. About \$160,000 in Percent for Art funds would become available. A new committee decided to use most of the money to care for existing art rather than buy new art.

"I always felt you should take care of your car before you buy a new car; that's my heritage," Bell said. "I knew the collection was in bad repair. It was all over the building; a legislator wouldn't like a piece outside his door, so it would go

into storage, and the Capitol doesn't have good storage."

Damaged pieces were repaired, soiled weavings cleaned, and badly mounted paintings reframed. Then Larry Fong, a curator at the University of Oregon's Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, took charge of relocating the artworks so they could be better appreciated. He pored over inventories, floor plans and art images, looking for pieces that complemented one another and spaces that could best highlight the works.

As a result, the dignitaries who attend this week's unveiling of the official portrait for Gov. Ted Kulongoski can't help but see Fong's favorite piece in the collection. It's Jan Zach's massive laminated-wood sculpture "Drapery of Memory," which now occupies a primo spot in the Senate Chamber lobby.

The new location is well lit, and it allows viewers to inspect the sculpture's sinuous curves from all sides. It's a far cry from the sculpture's previous home, the western State Street entrance, where Zach's masterwork had been pushed against a wall to keep the walkway clear.

Meanwhile, that ground-floor entrance has gotten an upgrade of its own. Now Tom Fawkes' huge, sunny painting "The Boathouse at Fresh Breeze" contrasts with the entryway's oak paneling. Across the hallway stands "Moonblades," a welded steel sculpture by Manuel Izquierdo, a major Oregon artist and teacher. Next to the sculpture, for the first time, hangs George Johanson's portrait of Izquierdo, his teacher and colleague, adding color and context to the sculpture.

The modern committee bought a few pieces to round out the work

of their 1970s predecessors. Among them: two small paintings by Nancy Lindburg, the artist services coordinator for the Oregon Arts Commission from 1978 to 1991 and a major influence on the 1970s collection. "Dakotascape I and II" are in the fourth-floor Senate lobby, beside a window whose view contrasts with her scenes.

Lindburg said last week that she felt "honored and very privileged" to have her work included in the Capitol collection.

The public should feel free to check out the newly installed art throughout the building's lobbies, halls, hearing rooms and entryways, she said.

"It's marvelous to have works of art in the same space as our working legislators occupy," she said. "The art, needless to say, makes the rooms of the Capitol far more beautiful than if they

were empty. It encourages creativity. I would encourage anybody to go to our beautiful state Capitol."

That will become easier once the Oregon Arts Commission completes two of the final steps in the project: a full catalog of the collection and a walking tour for Capitol visitors. There's also an online image database for Oregon's public art collections, which will be updated.

Meagan Atiyeh, the arts commission's current visual arts coordinator, said the catalog, brochure and database will help the teachers and schoolchildren who tour the Capitol as part of their Oregon studies.

But Atiyeh, who played in these halls when her grandfather, Vic Atiyeh, was governor, said all Oregonians can enjoy the refurbished art.

"I think the collection is culturally significant," she said. "It is not only high-quality artwork that is inspiring and beautiful; the photographs document Oregon's people and places. It's a story about our professions, our aspirations, what the state looks like."

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At a glance

What: Capitol Art Collection returns to the state Capitol

Why: 170 artworks, purchased in the late 1970s, have been reframed, refurbished, relocated and cataloged, using money from the Percent for Art program. Fourteen works have been added to the collection.

Open to the public? Yes, 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays; a walking tour is being prepared.

Online: For a photo gallery of part of the Capitol Art Collection, see this story at StatesmanJournal.com. For a searchable database of Oregon's public art, go to <http://knight.oregonartscommission.org>