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Carmen Lozar on the 2019 Faculty Biennial Art Exhibition

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WGLT Sound Ideas Interview with Carmen Lozar, October 10, 2019

Laura Kennedy: The Merwyn Gallery showcases the faculty biennial currently up through October 17th. The show highlights varied artistic talents of the professors in the school of art, including Connie Estep, Joshua Lowe, Claire Hedden, and Carmen Lozar who curates the galleries as well as teaches glass. Also, there's a work by design professor Mark Genrich, he's created a massive roundish sculpture, black on the outside with portholes to the inside of the work that reveal reflective surfaces. A light shining from within projects moving abstract images across the wall. Carmen Lozar says "It looks great in a lit room, but it is even more spectacular when the lights are doused."

Carmen Lozar: It makes for a great selfie when you look through one side and see someone else's face or your self. [Lozar laughs]. In this reflected mylar surface that's on the inside it's a quite – quite a large ambitious sculpture. It's called "Reflection Chamber", but its second title for it is "Crazy Diamond".

Kennedy: Did he talk about to what inspired him?

Lozar: I think that Mark is incredibly inspired by form, and as well as reflection and movement, and his work tends to be quite formal as he investigates shape, but also I think he always has this component of light. In componentry as well I would say, his work seems to really be about putting together parts and pieces to make a whole and you can see that in the way this piece is built. It's very calming in a way to sit and look at the walls with these kinds of circles traveling around, on you, around you, and on to the other artwork as well.

Kennedy: So I guess we better put the lights on so we could see the other artworks. So, lets actually go to the back and we have – uh – Connie Estep and –

Lozar: -- Connie Estep is our painting and drawing professor, she is an amazing teacher. They say she can teach anyone to draw. She really is an amazing drafts person, but also includes quite a bit of narrative and storytelling – just a bit of storytelling into her work and –

Kennedy: -- I'm glad you said that because when I first looked at these, I thought – you know – they looked like illustrations from . . . an old children's book that I might've found – in a -- in a vintage store somewhere, there's whimsy but there's also melancholy and great beauty.

Lozar: Ah, I would agree with you about the whimsy and the melancholy absolutely, I think she uses a lot of old text as reference, you know – clip art, really old clip art and things like that—and I think the titles on these are really poetic as well, they're all in one series. And if you look at the titles there's – let's see—there's "Last Wish", "Last Wind", "Last Heart". Like they're really beautiful, they seem to be about some sort of closure and loss, and then there's the sense of beauty as well that – that kind of is carried throughout – um each one. She's a great teacher, and I always love it when the teachers show what they're teaching and the students get to come down and say "Oh wow, now I know why I'm taking the class with that person because they're very very skilled . . . [laughs] . . . she's very skilled at drawing.

Kennedy: So, is that really the core push behind doing the faculty biennial?

Lozar: I think it's one of many components that make the show always interesting to the community, and the students. You always wanna see who you're learning from, you always wanna see what they can

do as well. I think it's also a chance for, really, the faculty to say this is who we are, truly we are teachers and we love to teach, but we're also practicing artists, and we exist in the world in a different way than just as a professor.

Kennedy: So, moving along. We have some work in ceramics, so I know this is Claire Hedden.

Lozar: She is really an amazing artist, I'm always happy to get to work with such amazing people, and Claire is one of those people. She constantly is impressing me with her skill and her ideas, and what she comes up with that to me is so different from the other work in the show. She has taken kind of this idea of a candle holder – something very simple – and she has probably within this show 20 variations on that idea. All working with line and shadow, with these really beautiful kind of hand-made thin structures – uh – and each one, you think you have one picked out that – you just – is really your favorite, most unique, and then you look next door to it and you go “Oh, but maybe I – I really enjoy that one as well.” So, it's amazing to me how many variations she can come up with, and how gorgeous and delicate each one is. You know they really do lend themselves to being picked up – um, to be carrying around -- carried around, they really look like an object that people could live with in their home and have on their table, and to me, I think that's quite a successful thing.

Kennedy: So let's move down a ways in the gallery and, we come upon the work of Joshua Lowe . . . and it's called “Tally Marks”.

Lozar: Yeah, this is a ve – this is a special person in this exhibition because he is our newest faculty member here, so he is our new graphic design faculty. One of the reasons these are such incredible wall pieces is because that – that he's a graphic designer, when we think of graphic designers we think of people doing work for other people. So like, your making business cards, your making two-dimensional work, basically representing someone else. Josh is obviously an artist in his own right, he's created these six pieces that are called “Tally Marks”. And as I look at them, and you look at them, they're each individually titled. One's titled “Ike Slept Under the Stars 1965-74 West of the Mississippi” they all have these very, Ike and Terry John planted seeds 1977-78. So, they're very interesting they're possibly about people – um – they have that long linear quality of a person –

Kennedy: -- They have sort of a wood – wood frame around them and its – there's a metal bar going across and he's strung various things, various materials, threads, and such, and there's also nails that have been pounded into it and incorporated as well. He's incorporated cigarettes and also – um – clothes pins –

Lozar: [Inaudible interruption] – So there's some narrative, some vague narrative happening here, that's referencing I think – um a time—

Kennedy: --Some people he knows—

Lozar: --People he knows or a time from the past, and they are just beautifully made when you look at these frames – these maple frames – they're just so gorgeous, and you don't often think of a designer working in a three-dimensional way. So, we're so excited to have him because it makes an impression on our students when they see us working in various mediums.

Kennedy: And last, but certainly not least. . . Carmen – It's you!—

Lozar: It's me! I do love –

Kennedy: -- Your work!

Lozar: I do love to get to show in this show.

Kennedy: Your glass works and some and uh – and some found objects as well incorporated here. And, of course, when I look at these wonderful objects like “Nurse Log” we have a woman stretched out on – on glass, and there’s something growing out of her. And I – I wanna say whimsy, does the word whimsy? – is that okay with you? I don’t know – I don’t know if [Lozar interrupts] someone else would appreciate that.

Lozar: Oh, yeah! Absolutely they – they – First of all, they’re figuring like they’re very small so, they – they go to that tradition. They’re small, they’re narrative, they’re mixing – you know reality and fantasy a bit. So, I think whimsy is fine and I think that they’re sweet, a lot of them are sweet pieces. I’ve found that since having children my work has gotten a little more sweet, which is always – you know you change—

Kennedy: -- So you’re picking up from your kids?

Lozar: Yeah! I think you fluctuate – you know through your life as you grow and change, and have new ex – new experiences. So, yeah like this piece “Nurse Log” has – uh – actual small tree and plants, mushrooms growing out of this glass figure. A Nurse log is something that we don’t necessarily have around here but, in the northwest when a – you know a great tree is felled in the forest – other plants use that to grow out of and start new life –

Kennedy: -- And so it is nursing them along.

Lozar: Right, and I – and I think of that – um – in terms of like our relationship to the world and – you know not only just through plants this is really just a metaphor for the – for a larger idea.

Kennedy: Next to it is one – you have glass and wood incorporated. A figure, and the figure is sitting on a block and it’s entitled “Titan Knots”. And – and a nice – a glass yarn wall and her head looks like [Kennedy laughs] its all tied up in yarn as well. I have to know the inspiration for this, Carmen.

Lozar: I think that’s just our lives, it’s just about our lives today. We are asked to do so much, and to be so much, and we look every direction and try to do every little thing and really it does end up tying us in knots. And, it’s hard to focus, and take time for ourselves. So, this is a very simple idea behind that piece. I think it’s just a very straightforward [Lozar laughs] – I think that day I made it I was just really feeling, rushed and – and you know um – multi-tasking, a lit – a little too much multitasking.

Kennedy: And you can’t rush through glass work either?

Lozar: No, and you have to have the time and the experience and the willingness to invest in that time for a good solid day or two if you wanna make something.

Kennedy: Next to that, is one called “Simply Fight”. And here you have incorporated some found objects of – a ketchup a little – uh packet of ketchup, and a little packet of mustard and out of them grow these figures and they’re fighting and it just – it gives us the – th – the age old debate – you know are you a ketchup person or are you a mustard person [Both laugh]

Lozar: Absolutely, and this again goes back to having children and relating to them and they're like – I have two daughters that're two years apart – and they love each other dearly but, boy they do fight a lot. And, sometimes they are so different, they're just scrapping around all the time. And so, I don't think that they recognize that themselves in this piece but, to me it's very clear who these two characters are. [Lozar laughs] its –

Kennedy: -- The one next to it is "Bubble Gum" as well, we have charming figures coming out of wads of bubble gum.

Lozar: Yes. And I think that – I try to use glass as a material that responds to what I'm making, it's the best thing if you can . . . combine your material with your idea. So, in the case of the spilled ketchup or the spilled mustard, it has that shiny quality its kind of liquidity, it's able to look like it's coming out of those packets. With the bubble gum you as well have this ability to stretch glass and make it look sticky and wet. So, I find that using glass as a material for, to – to create imagery with spills and wet things or things that are food like. It's one of my favorite things to do.

Kennedy: How do you balance your . . . demands? You have demands as a teacher, home demands with the family, and then of course the studio is always calling.

Lozar: It's a really hard thing – in fact this morning before I came in I was in the studio working frantically for a little bit. And what the studio does is I think it tends to fill an artist up and make them a happier person. So even just a little hour or two I got this morning made me feel kind of refreshed and ready for the day and more internally – um – satisfied. [Lozar laughs] So, yeah I think there's always that demand, and the studio is always calling that is very true. And then there's times where I have to say 'Okay I'm juggling a lot and it won't always be this intense and I will have time for the studio.' I have to think towards the future and say – you know summers it's really wonderful when you're a professor and you can concentrate during those summer months on your practice.

Kennedy: That's artist, professor, and curator, Carmen Lozar. The faculty biennial continues through October 17th at the Merwyn Gallery, I'm Laura Kennedy.

Additional Interview Material

The following was not part of the original WGLT interview that aired, but was included on WGLT's website.

Carmen Lozar: If you're coming in to the smaller gallery – weekly gallery – it's really interesting drawings by Dr. Tim Garbi who was a pastor historian here. He is a Emeritus professor and his drawings are just – a really wonderfully irreverent and just really incredible. People in the area may know him as a sculptor. He has been doing a series of drawings.

Laura Kennedy: Let's look at them.

Lozar: Yeah!

Kennedy: Oh, and these are fun!

Lozar: Yes, these drawings are – I think – I hope that he thinks they are fun because I think they are fun. I think that they – right immediately because they are into this really creative hand and they are bright colors that are outlined. They're – they're just very much like an illustration from – from a book – from a – you know, but then, you look at the subject matter as you get closer and you're – you kind of wonder, you know, there's a man holding a gun in his underpants, and then you have a whole series of drawings that are about a sandwich. You have at least three of these drawings that where the people are – let me redo the title of this... um so one is entitled BLT of a woman holding a sandwich, one's entitled Bologna and Lettuce, another PBJ and these drawings and the characters he's created – they have such personality.

Kennedy: I would not grab a sandwich from these people cause I know I'd come away with a fat lip ...[Lozar laughs]...

Lozar: I think they really look like they want their sandwiches.

Kennedy: Yeah.

Lozar: So I just love – I love knowing Tim's work, his woodwork, his – that sculptural work, and then seeing these, and these drawings and how they relate to that – they're just – it's like the next step forward for me. They're just so interesting. He has a whole series that are entitled that are entitled "The Good Studio" and these are out in our display case and each of these, the titles are so interesting to me because every artist wants a good studio-

Kennedy: -you mean the physical space?-

Lozar: -Yeah, a physical place to work and you will find artists working in closets and garages, wherever they can find a space and he has his whole series of drawings, you know, about a good studio and they have a figure in front and then they have a studio building way far in the distance.

Kennedy: 'Man in small boat sad to leave a good studio.'

Lozar: Yeah, and the next one is 'Man showing the way to a good studio', 'Man eating lunch outside a good studio', 'Two men sneaking up on a good studio'

Kennedy: 'In a horse costume'

Lozar: In a horse costume, so you can tell that Tim probably would really love a good studio, just as every artist would love a good studio. Tim has a beautiful studio, I know but I wonder if he would prefer maybe one of the studios drawn here.

Kennedy: Where is his studio, you know?

Lozar: His studio is in – in the basement of his house.

Kennedy: No light? No natural light?

Lozar: It's a – well you would think so. It's a beautiful space. He has a – as a woodworker, he has it set up really nicely

Kennedy: Oh!!!

Lozar: But no, I can see how everybody would want an independent building outside of their house that has great lights. If you notice, all the windows in all of these drawings

Kennedy: Yes.

Lozar: So – so I think it's just a commentary that every artist can identify with these – these particular drawings ...[laughs]...

Kennedy: I feel like I've been let in on something very special and now I understand something a little bit more about artists.

Lozar: [laughs]...absolutely!