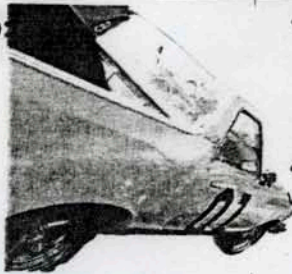


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**TODAY'S WEATHER**High: 66°  
Low: 48°**Thursday, May 1, 2003**  
**Mustang**  
**DAILY**

Volume LXVII, Number 119, 1916-2003

8 Thursday, May 1, 2003

Arts &amp; Culture

Mustang Daily

**Healing Power****ReMEMbering victims through artwork**By **Andy Fahey**

MUSTANG DAILY STAFF WRITER

Providing hope to those who need it most is sometimes best accomplished with the stroke of a brush.

Local artist Dorothy Riggs will attempt to help victims of sexual assault and domestic violence with her artwork today in the University Union

as part of Cal Poly's ReMEMber Week.

Riggs will display six oil paintings and also debut "The Garden of SHEden" CD-ROM. It is an interactive collection of art, music, virtual reality and computer animation and is narrated by Riggs.

► "The Garden of SHEden" CD-ROM is available at the following San Luis Obispo locations:

- Unity Bookstore
- 2 Dogs' Coffee Co.
- The Gallery at the Network
- TD Parker Salon and Gallery
- San Luis Obispo Art Center

"I think it could be a kind of guiding light for other women," she said.

Riggs, who is a survivor of rape and domestic violence, said she feels very close to the women ReMEMber Week is designed to support.

"As an artist I can bring issues to raise awareness," she said. "That's the way I can be an activist."

As a feminist, Riggs uses art as a therapeutic process. Many of her paintings are about women's rights and contain abstract figurative images of women.

"It's a really interesting aspect that will add to the whole dynamic of the (week)," said Hayley Myers, an English senior and student supervisor at the Women's Center. "It will show people that they can have a creative outlet. They don't have to do more traditional things like mourn."

Riggs described her painting style as "abstract symbology" — with bold color and rounded forms.

"It's very eye-catching," Myers said. "People are going to wonder what the hell is going on with it."

Putting together "The Garden of SHEden," a three-year project, proved to be a personal experience for Riggs. She often writes poetry and keeps a daily journal and the CD-ROM provided a medium to display her writings, in addition to her paintings, in a high-tech and artistic manner.

"This CD has become an electronic autobiography," Riggs said.

"The Garden of SHEden" allows the viewer to see, hear and understand Riggs' work, a rare feature in the art world.

"If you were to go into a museum or in a gallery and look at a piece of art, you might think, 'Gee, I really like that, but I wonder what was in the artist's mind. Why did they paint that? Where did that come from? I wonder

what motivated the artist,'" she said.

Compiling the CD-ROM gave her the chance to be vocal and tell stories of why she painted a certain selection, she added.

Perhaps the strongest message in "The Garden of SHEden" is the use of art as healing. Riggs fell into deep depression and ceased painting following the deaths of her parents in 1995. Only with the urging of a friend was she able to get back into the studio and work. By creating art, "these boulders of pain just rolled off my back," Riggs said.

"I know what it's like to grieve because I've lost people in my life," she said. "I think that my CD offers hope and shows an example of how you could cope with adversity and how you could get through grief."

"Art has a transformative power to help one release any bound-up emotions inside," she continued. "It's a safe way to release even anger or rage."

This therapeutic process can be especially helpful in dealing with acts of sexual violence.

"People need a way to speak or just get out their feelings about sexual assault and sexual violence," Myers said. "There is a silence that surrounds sexual assaults, and the purpose of ReMEMber Week and all of these events is to break that silence so people will talk about it and thereby become more aware."

Awareness of sexual violence is the first step before taking a firm stance



COURTESY PHOTO

**'Red River Run,' an oil painting by Dorothy Riggs, is on display today from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the University Union Plaza as part of the ReMEMber Week activities. Riggs said she uses her artwork as an emotional release and a tool for healing.**

against it, she said.

"Thinking about it is good, but when you take your own energy and your own passion to create something physically and show that to the world, that's a big deal," Myers said. "That shows that you care and you're not

only thinking about it, but you care enough that you're doing something about it."

"The Garden of SHEden" will be available to demo and for purchase today in the University Union Plaza from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.