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Visiting artist winds up staying in Alva



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By Lynn L. Martin | 0 comments

Elizabeth Gahan

"When I visited my parents in San Diego for the holidays, the temperature stayed around 78 degrees," said Elizabeth Gahan before the Friday Night Artwalk. "Then when I returned to my home of the last six years, Seattle, it was pretty cold. After that, I started my visiting artist six-week tour in Alva and I learned it can snow one day and be 70 degrees the next. It's definitely been an experience and I am learning to adapt to more variety," Gahan said.

Gahan is the first "visiting artist" in a revamped art program at Northwestern Oklahoma State University, whose department head is Jave Yoshimoto.

The purpose of the program is to bring artists from all parts of the country to live and work here for a certain amount of time. The purpose is to have dialogue with students and also to engage the community in new artistic perspectives. The way it works on campus is Yoshimoto conducts art classes. Gahan's studio on campus is inside the art department.

"He can bring his students to me and we can discuss my ideas and processes," Gahan said. "I try to make myself very accessible for any kind of questions so we have more of an

on-going conversation rather than specific lectures. I think making it a little less formal makes it more accessible for the students," she said.

Fine Arts and Global Studies

A graduate of the University of Southern California-Santa Barbara, Gahan's undergraduate degrees are in fine arts and global studies. She explained the global studies really defines what she wants to say in her art. Most of her global study work was done in Santa Barbara, but she also studied abroad for one-year.

Painting and Installation Art

On display Friday night in Alva at The Runnymede, Gahan's painting exhibit captured local buildings such as the Rialto Theater, The Runnymede and a portion of Barnes Street showing three buildings beginning at Happiness House.

While the buildings were easily recognizable, the paintings were unique, in that patterns relating to the buildings were overprinted within the painting. For example, the windows at The Runnymede have lace curtains. The pattern from those curtains was lightly combined with the painting of the building.

The "installation art" is a new term for most residents. This type of art consists of objects Gahan calls "found materials" or "unexpected materials" arranged to become something that references, say, the surroundings.

On display at Graceful Arts was a piece of art consisting of many colors of ribbons combined with burlap in a form that almost looked like a child's outdoor play tent. Gahan explained that this represents the landscape of the area, which is flat and sloping. She picked up on the idea while driving on the "Americana Highway" in this area.

Leaving Alva

Gahan returns to Seattle on Monday to her art studio, which is near an industrial district that attracts many artists such as metal workers, wood workers, ceramics workers and painters. She receives many grants from cities and private foundations to support her installation art. Last year, she displayed installation art in many locations around Seattle including the main downtown area. Our final question brought a big laugh from Gahan. We asked if she was going to leave any broken-hearted cowboys in Alva when she returns home. She laughed happily, saying "No! I'm going home to a broken-hearted husband and I am very excited to see him."

A video of this interview is online at www.AlvaReviewCourier.com.