

The essence of spirituality

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Since before scientifically recorded time, we humans have reached deep inside ourselves to understand our connection to the great mystery of life, its origin, the reason for existing, the hereafter.

We have worshipped, established rituals and codes of behavior; we've studied and written books, composed music, sung, painted great murals, constructed edifices.

In a seasonally appropriate exhibit, Mendocino's Gallery One presents "Works of Faith," a visual multi-media show featuring artworks by over forty artists, the majority of them local. Representing a cross-section of religions and beliefs, the exhibit provides the viewer with a looking-glass into his or her own spirituality, whether it be traditional or indescribably personal.

Curator Georgia Ann Gregory, co-owner of Gallery One (formerly the Ruth Carlson Gallery) said she was specifically inspired to compile the exhibit after viewing several works by artist Mina Cohen, who lost family members during the Holocaust.

Powerful visual commentaries on the persecution of Jews during World War II, Cohen's mixed media pieces in the "Works of Faith" exhibit includes "Run Judit" which features a large, bones-akimbo skeleton along with words spoken by a concentration camp guard to Cohen's mother.

The Jewish religion inspired many of the exhibit's works. Artist Erin Dertner, usually known for her homey landscapes and cottages, depicts a somber-clothed, meditative rabbi at the Wailing Wall in

Jerusalem.

Christianity is mightily represented. Artist Pamela Hahn — who although a Unitarian, was fascinated by the ritual of the

*Oh, that I had the wings of a dove...
I would hurry to my place of shelter,
far from the tempest and storm.*

— from Psalm 55

Catholic church — has created a lifesize, stuffed-fabric fount.

A particularly ethereal three-dimensional piece is Ilja Tinfo's serene "Object," a wooden cross in which each eroded layer glows with subtle iridescence, a perfect pearl of infinity floating in a dark recess.

The joyful naive art of Sev Jekes is represented by "Beautiful Day for a Wedding" with the Mendocino Presbyterian church as backdrop; and nature's magnificent and unfettered spirituality is found in several fine oils by E. John Robinson.

For many artists, the abstract is more powerful than the realistic. Two starkly pure monoprints by Elizabeth Ross speak of life and death; the mystic power of Stonehenge is conveyed by Bob Rhoades monotypes; and N'ima Leveton's mixed media sculptures stand as gateways to enlightenment.

One wall is made up of iconographic works including James Sibbet's mixed media collage "Untitled," and James Maxwell's shrines created during the Persian Gulf war.

An elegant, finely crafted display of metalworks includes the sterling silver and cloissone enamel "Chalice" by James Carter, and a cast glass and aluminum "Menorah" by Stephen Schlanser.

Choosing the pieces for the exhibit was not done formally, noted

Gregory who once attended seminary school. "I knew some of the artists, others were found through customers, and I would look through art magazines then contact certain people."

She continued to add artworks to the exhibit until a week before it opened on Nov. 11, "but I finally had to tell myself to stop," she laughed.

"At one time," said Gregory, "we humans used to have our artifacts and religious objects in our homes as well as our churches. I think we got away from that, but it seems like we're turning back... that we have a need to be reminded of our spirituality."

"Works of Faith" will run through Nov. 28, with some of the pieces continuing to be exhibited at Gallery One through December.

1995