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# Artist is 'blown away by the beauty of nature' in Panama

By Star Traylor  
*Special to The Winchester Star*

**WINCHESTER** — Many an artist has been inspired by the beauty and culture of foreign lands.

Shenandoah University Assistant Professor of Art Geraldine Wojno Kiefer wanted to go to another country with the school's Global Citizenship Program to expand her horizons and become a "more understanding, flexible, and creative teacher."

Kiefer traveled to Panama with about a dozen other people in March 2007 through the program.

"I knew Panama was a rainforest country, but I hadn't expected to be so aesthetically blown away by the beauty of nature," Kiefer said.

The program's goal is to make it possible for students, faculty, and staff to travel abroad and



Geraldine Kiefer will display about 60

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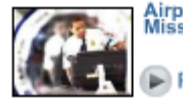
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experience the cultural diversity of the world so they are better

pieces of artwork at Bridgewater College's Cleo Driver Miller Art Gallery through Dec. 14, showing artwork inspired from two trips to the Central American country of Panama. (Ginger Perry)

prepared to contribute as "global citizens," said R.T. Good, SU's Dean of Global Education.

The trip in March and a later one Kiefer took during an artist's residency were the inspiration for about 60 pieces of artwork that will be on display at Bridgewater College's Cleo Driver Miller Art Gallery through Dec. 14.

Kiefer will lecture about the exhibit at 7:30 p.m. Monday in Cole Hall during the Bridgewater College Convocation Series. A reception is set from 5 to 7 p.m. prior to the lecture.

The story of how Kiefer created the approximately 60 pieces in the exhibit, "Panama Overlays," begins with the first trip to Panama through SU. Like any tourist, she took lots of photos. But when they were developed, she was inspired to turn them into artwork.

She asked her husband, Bruce Kiefer, a retired architect and fine art photographer, to print the photos on 7-by-10-inch paper, and then she drew over the pictures with pencil, connecting things in the photo that she thought were spiritually powerful.

Kiefer noticed some common themes among the pictures she had taken. One was the image of a paradise garden; the others showed thresholds to sacred spaces, such as the entrance to a church or mosque.

The project evolved as Kiefer continued adding to the photographs. She drew borders and wrote spiritual quotes from other sources in her own calligraphy.

Later, she decided a second trip to Panama could help her expand the exhibit.



"I Googled artists' residencies in Panama because I wanted to



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She will lecture about the exhibit at 7:30 p.m. Monday in Cole Hall during the Bridgewater College Convocation Series. (Ginger Perry)

go back there and make artwork," Kiefer said.

She found a residency through the Taller Portobelo Norte Summer Art Colony,

which sends artists to the town of Portobelo for two weeks, they hold an exhibition at the end.

On this trip, Kiefer used portable supplies such as precut sheets of watercolor paper, graphite, watercolors, pen and ink, and pencil. She drew buildings and structures around the town. Then she looked for patterns and shapes in the structures to develop the drawing.

"This is very abstract," Kiefer said, referring to one of the pieces. "You can call it organic abstractions. As I developed these drawings, I noticed they looked like they could be linked together."

Kiefer will return to Portobelo in 2008 for the same residency to continue work on "Panama Overlays." She plans to do a detailed series of 12 drawings using significant places and sites, including churches, forts, government buildings, and cemeteries as the subjects.

In the project proposal, Kiefer writes that "Panama Overlays" probes "familiarity and unfamiliarity, the spiritual and cultural, and ultimately an intercontinental flow of space and place through drawing, photography, and text."

There are no current plans for "Panama Overlays" to come to Winchester, but Kiefer is hoping it eventually will. A show in Winchester, she said, would require a sizeable space. She plans to encourage students in her art classes at SU to travel to Bridgewater to see the exhibit.

Kiefer credits SU's Global Citizenship Program with inspiring the works and aiding her evolution as an artist.

"This was so incredibly life-changing," Kiefer said.

Good said students who participate in the program are expected to give back to the school and community in some way after returning from the trips with debriefing sessions, outreach programs, and newspaper articles.

"Does everyone step up to the plate as Dr. Kiefer has done? Many do in very different ways; not all. Students have written articles, created dance projects, presented programs in schools for children, contributed to SU's Creative Scholarship Day with panel discussions, and many other things," he said in an e-mail interview.

"There is a strong sense of this program by many at Shenandoah University, and particularly by those who participated in the experience, that it has significantly changed their lives (and their thinking) which you could expect would happen with an intercultural experience that is well designed as a cultural learning experience," Good said. "That's the focus, not travel for the sake of travel, but travel for the sake of intercultural understanding through exposure directly to the host culture in a destination."

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