

COMMUNITY

Library celebrates free speech with banned-book art show

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Intern Reporter

Some colorful guests found their way into the Kirkland Library last month – a large yellow Ganesh atop an old dresser, a 3D mockingbird made completely of paper and several tiny Harry Potter characters, to name a few.

Kirkland librarian Elsa Steele found an innovative way to celebrate Banned Books Week this year. She invited local artists to read a banned book and then use the book itself in a piece of art with no limits – only that the book must be impossible to open.

The result was 12 creative works of art, each honoring a different banned book. The pieces were placed on pedes-

tals in the Kirkland Library to commemorate the week.

"The creations are far greater than anything I could have imagined," Steele said.

Even today, there are hundreds of banned and censored books. Banned Books Week, created by the American Library Association, takes place in the last week of September and celebrates the freedom of speech and of opinion. Although the Kirkland Library had acknowledged the week in previous years by putting banned books on display, this is the first time the books were celebrated through art.

The show was also made possible by Quinn Elliott and Jason Haif of the Kirkland Arts Center and local artist Rebecca DeVere, who helped organize the event. DeVere, who describes herself as a frequent visitor to the library, sent emails to hundreds of artists in order to coordinate the event.

She also created some arti-

work herself – a concrete head covered in glitter resin – inspired by *Go Ask Alice*.

"Most of the artists had no idea books are still banned,"

DeVere said. "People shouldn't put their own individual morals on what we see, hear, and read. You never know who's going to write the next great American novel and where their inspiration will come from."

Another artist involved with the project was Donna Porter, whose interpretation of the *Kama Sutra* is a sunny yellow Ganesh made of clay.

"I decided to make my Ganesh female because the *Kama Sutra* is an informative book for women and Ganesh needs to protect her right to read," Porter said. "It's very dangerous to ban books – we end up with boxed in minds."

Other works of art include a locked shut edition of *The Giver*, a version of *The Catcher in the Rye* tied up with

twine and a cut-up copy of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

An artist reception was held earlier this month. Some of the art pieces were donated to the library and will be auctioned to raise money for the Library Foundation. The other pieces were returned to the artists.

Steele called the event "very successful" and said that many people came through the library to observe the art.

"It was a subtle show, but it still was effective. It was mind-bending rather than a propaganda piece," she said. "It started some lively conversations."

She said the library will "definitely" have another show next year.



Courtesy photo

A caged "The Giver" was one of many "Banned" books displayed as artwork at the Kirkland Library last month.