



Chelsea Benedict, foreground, adjusts a display at Lake Oswego's Onda Gallery as owner Pablo Merlo Flores looks on. The new gallery focuses on sustainability and fair trade.

STAFF PHOTO / CLIFF NEWELL

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Gallery displays sustainability

New showroom in LO focuses on environment-friendly works and fair trade

By CLIFF NEWELL

Staff Reporter

Pablo Merlo Flores has lived for the past 10 years in Lake Oswego, so he considers the city his home.

In fact, the native Argentinean considers Lake Oswego the perfect place for his new Onda Gallery, which will have its opening celebration on Saturday night at 6:30.

Merlo Flores intends to make Onda a model for a new kind of art gallery — based on

sustainability, fair trade and developing close relationships with artists and artisans.

"First of all, I live here and I know a lot of people," said Flores, in explaining why he is opening the gallery. "Second, this is a community that believes deeply in art. It also cares for sustainability and fair trade.

"I hope I can experiment here, do things and take what I learn to other galleries. I want to make this the central gallery for the others."

Flores also owns an art gallery on Alberta Street in Portland, but he noted, "The Lake Oswego market is very, very different. I think what we have to offer will be welcome."

Perhaps such a deep plunge into art would only be possible in a city like Lake Oswego, in which the streets are lined with sculptures. But Flores is going world-wide for his artisans: There will be a strong Latin American influence from Chile (light fixtures), Ecuador (wavy glass and candle holders), Peru, Nicaragua, Guatemala and his native Argentina (ceramic sushi trays). There will also be a Viet Nam and American flavor.

Treating these artisans fairly is a priority for Flores. "When you buy here, you'll know exactly where your money is going," he said. "You'll be supporting a family and a community."

Plus you'll be sustaining the world.

"The glass is 20 percent recycled, the wood is 100 percent recycled," Flores said.

"The metals are all recycled. Our sculptures are made out of scrap metal. There's a serious effort to refurbish raw material. Our gallery was repainted with recycled paint and also our mural" (located at the front entrance).

For the fine art, local artists will provide a variety of styles in watercolors, pastels, sculptures, cement, metal and glass. Flores intends to have such close connections with the com-

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munity and artists that work can be created on demand.

"We can do whatever you want," he said. "We can even use your own design."

Daring to be different has its rewards.

"It's a unique thing," Flores said. "There's not many art galleries in Portland or in the USA like this. It's not better or worse, it's just what we want to emphasize."

This ideal is what made Chelsea Benedict want to come be the director of the Onda Gallery.

"I saw this great opportuni-

ty to be inspired by art," said Benedict, a native of Tualatin and now a resident of West Linn. "The whole sustainability and free trade mentality is very important to me."

Flores has come a long way in the art world. He was in the art distribution business for 10 years, and the first artist he worked with specialized in making leather masks. It was an experience that made Flores sensitive to the needs of artists. "Through them I gained a great admiration for art in general," Flores said. "I wanted to get more involved. From that point on I met 60 artists and got a good understanding of what I wanted to develop in my business.

"I envision a different model for a gallery operation. I don't want to tie down an artist in a way that he loses his freedom. I do ask for loyalty and trust. I want artists who support our mission and goal." Flores definitely got more involved. A year and a half ago he purchased the gallery on Alberta Street. And if all goes well in Lake Oswego, Flores will open more art galleries in Portland and also across the nation. He already has his eye on Seattle.

Onda Gallery is located at 220 A St., Suite 104 in Lake Oswego.

For All to view

Story by: Josh Kulla – Wilsonville Spokesman

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It's just another cycle of life. Only this cycle doesn't actually involve living, breathing beings. Instead, it's the annual replacement of the city of Wilsonville's public art installations.

Eight pieces of public art installed a year ago at strategic points in the town center were moved or replaced Monday with fresh sculptures commissioned from local artists.

"Some of them are pretty dramatic, we're looking forward to getting them up," said Keith Amundson, interim chairman of the Wilsonville Council for Public Art.

Amundson and fellow WCPA members were in charge of selecting this year's sculptures. Their task was a bit more complicated than in 2007, because several of last year's sculptures will either remain in place or be moved to other locations rather than be replaced.

"We like them well enough, and the artists have agreed to leave them in place for a little longer," Amundson said.

Among the keepers are pieces by local artists Jesse Swickard, and Laurel Hagner. "Look Up," currently at Wilsonville city hall, will move to Walgreens, while "Beginning of the Wind," by Hagner, will move from Walgreens back to city hall later in the month. In addition, the sculpture "Re-Invention," by artist Ivan McLean, will remain at the Wilsonville Public Library, where it currently graces the entrance at Memorial Drive.

"It's been great, they've supported this for five years," Swickard said Monday as he readied "Look Up" for a move across town.

He noted that more cities in Oregon and Washington are looking to install public art than ever before, including the city of Keizer, which looked to Wilsonville for inspiration.

"They've sampled off of our program here, which is exciting," he said.

Swickard noted that public art is more rewarding for him than simply selling his work in a gallery because of the educational factor.

"For me, it's the message in the piece," he said. "I try to educate with my interaction with the public. I try to teach them something."

In that vein, one of Swickard's latest creations, "Spotted Owl," was installed at the Wilsonville Visitor Center Monday morning in place of "Testudo," a sculpture by Mylan Rakich that was installed, tall and harp-like, a year ago.

"It's a little different than going to a show in a gallery," Swickard said.

New in 2008

Also new in 2008 will be eight more sculptures to replace the rest of last year's crop. Further, "Strange Homeland," another of Hagner's creations, will grace the soon-to-be-

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finished railway station in west Wilsonville which is being built to serve the new WES commuter rail line.

Swickard will again be well-represented among the new work, with sculptures going in at the visitor center and the city's south public works building across from city hall on Town Center Loop.

On Monday, the new pieces were installed and existing art moved by city work crews. Peggy Waiters, city community services director has been one of the city's main point of contacts with the WCPA. She said that because the installations were taking place along Wilsonville Road and other main thoroughfares, minor traffic disruptions would be experienced.

"There will be minor inconveniences to citizens on the roads or in parking lots," she said beforehand. "But most of the installations will be 30 minutes or less."

Wilsonville Public Works Department personnel assisted with traffic control, with the WCPA also providing volunteer flaggers.

Swickard a favorite

From Amundson's perspective, Swickard nicely represents the perspective the group wishes to share with Wilsonville. An anecdote about another sculpture Swickard did for the city's Korean War veterans group illustrated Amundson's point.

"The Korean War veterans asked for one of Jesse Swickard's sculptures, and they wanted it to be unobtrusive," he recalled. "So, they asked him to tone it down to brown from its original red. So, Jesse, he decided to give them a brown one, and he made them another one that's red. It's kind of indicative of the artistic temperament of the artist who didn't want his creation messed with."

The brown sculpture, dubbed "Guardian," can still be found at Wilsonville's City Park in front of the war memorial. There, it casts its gaze over the black granite slab which honors America's alliance with South Korea in the latter's struggle against North Korea and China.

"It's fulfilling its mission nicely," Amundson said.