

Innovation and Courage – Polly Nordstrand, Curator of Southwest Art

It has only been two short years since Polly Nordstrand joined the staff at the Fine Arts Center's museum. Yet in those two years, Polly has made a big impact. Polly's job entails curating exhibitions from the museum's permanent collection of Native American and Latinx art, as well as special exhibitions of modern and contemporary art from the American Southwest. Her work supports the museum's efforts to bring the finest art from the Southwest region to the Colorado Springs community, and to build relationships with local, regional, and national artists, source cultures, and institutions. Polly has gone above and beyond that description in many ways; she has been a powerful force championing Native and marginalized voices in the cultural life of CC.

Polly has brought a world-class set of exhibitions to the FAC featuring indigenous and women artists such as Baseera Khan, Nora Naranjo Morse (Santa Clara), Melanie Yazzie (Diné) and Anna Tsouhlarakis (Creek/Diné). Her exhibition *Pertenecer: Chicana artists on belonging* features important works from Latinx artists and examines notions of family, community, and identity in the Southwest. Polly has also been an active contributor to campus life, bringing artists, scholars, musicians, and performers such as Adrienne Chalepah (Kiowa/Comanche/Apache), and traditional dancers to campus for public events including First Mondays and Cornerstone Arts Week.

Polly's goal always is to honor the work of individual artists while also supporting the needs of all related communities. She continually asks us to consider, who is art for? And how is what we do (a museum exhibition or performance, an action or a policy) benefitting those audiences? Polly's approach to her work focuses on connecting artists with communities to build possibilities for engagement, transformation, and understanding broadly. In fostering the work of Native artists and artists of color, providing opportunities for artists to work creatively and collaboratively realize their goals, and sharing knowledge of their work, Polly has created a unique space for Southwest art at CC. In cultivating this particular multicultural sense of place, Polly has also raised the national stature of the college and the FAC in the arts. Her recent grant from the prestigious Warhol Foundation to support the groundbreaking upcoming exhibition *Queer Indigenous Visualities* is good evidence of the respect for Polly's work nationally.

Two recent events exemplify the high quality of Polly's work with indigenous and artists of color and her effectiveness in creating transformative experiences that build lasting relationships. The first, the August 29 performance of violinist Laura Ortman (White Mountain Apache), affected all in the packed audience of Packard Hall. Polly invited Ortman as an ideal artist to bring to campus to exemplify the talent originating in the Southwest as well as the highest levels of excellence in contemporary multimedia art. Ortman, who is a Brooklyn, NY-based composer, musician, and artist, describes herself as a "sound sculptor." Using instruments as varied as a piano, electric guitar, megaphone, flute, voice, and four-track tape recorder to play back her vast audio experiments, Ortman's audio improvisations create dense, almost palpable, emotive atmospheres. The performance was disturbing, challenging, intriguing, gorgeous, and intense: Ortman's art asked all listeners to abandon expectation and sink into the possibilities of a pure creative and expressive experience. As both an example of the richness of contemporary work by indigenous artists, and a metaphor for the way greater understanding of cultural difference opens new horizons, Ortman's performance was transcendent. Nordstrand's goal was realized: to broaden their audience's understanding of artists like Ortman, to challenge and expand our perceptions and beliefs about art and indigenous people, and to build a community among the audience, all of whom emerged changed by the experience.

Another recent example of Polly's diverse and inclusive work is the recent interpretation of Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) through a celebratory community event and exhibit Nov. 1-2. The museum's permanent collection includes thousands of artworks from Latinx and Southwestern cultures. Día de los Muertos is a holiday celebrated in the U.S. and Mexico to honor deceased loved ones and keep their memory alive. Polly and Kris Stanec, director of museum education, and countless others collaborated to create a community celebration that aimed to both celebrate and educate about this important part of Hispanic culture. Polly brought together local artists Jerry Vigil and Maruca Salazar, Aztec and folklorico dancers, mariachi musicians, student bands,

and local K-12 teachers and students to create this community-focused event. The event featured a traditional Aztec altar by Maruca Salazar, *ofrendas* by area school groups, like Stuart's class, free art-making activities, food, and much more. Polly's vision connected culture, community, education, and the CC alumni network in a creative display highlighting these beautiful relationships. Madi Stuart '13, MAT '14, who majored in Spanish and also received her Master's in Teaching, works at Manitou Springs Middle School. She and her students created an *ofrenda* that celebrated the life and memory of Charles Rockey, an iconic local artist who passed away over the summer. In addition to working with local schools to make class *ofrendas*, over 130 local students participated in tours of the *ofrendas* with CC Spanish-speaking students. Overall, well over 500 people attended Día de los Muertos at the FAC, including families and communities entirely new to CC.

In addition to her work in the museum Polly was one of five staff and faculty who led the work on the proposal to reclaim and rename space on the Colorado College campus for indigenous peoples. In a recent ceremony over homecoming weekend, Tava Quad was officially renamed and blessed by members of the Ute tribe and other representatives. Polly has been a tireless supporter of students in NASU and SOMOS, and an engaged collaborator with faculty and staff across campus. Her work on supporting campus communities for Native and Hispanic students ranges from initiating an annual welcome for indigenous students and staff, to advocating for new policies, to providing support and logistical assistance to the NASU students organizing the CC powwow in spring 2019, to mentoring interns, to travelling with NASU leadership on a block break study trip to Santa Fe.

These are but a few recent examples of the exemplary work that Polly Nordstrand has brought to the FAC and CC, as well as the communities of Colorado Springs. Through these events, her museum curation, and her dedication to the students at CC, Polly has helped transform CC into a thriving center for indigenous contemporary artists. Her work asks us to challenge the traditional structures and old fashioned beliefs built into the DNA of institutions such as museums and colleges. At the same time, Polly's work unveils the tremendously affirming possibilities of a truly diverse and inclusive approach to culture by being courageous and innovating. CC has benefitted broadly and in myriad ways from her tireless efforts.

Innovation and Courage – Tomi-Ann Roberts (1 of 2 nominations)

I hereby nominate Dr. Tomi-Ann Roberts for the Glenn Brooks “Innovation and Courage” Award. I do this with the emphasis on courage. Tomi-Ann is well known in academia because of her research on objectification of women’s bodies—indeed, her groundbreaking scientific article on this topic now has over 3,500 scientific citations (a huge number). She has certainly been an advocate for women on the CC campus for over two decades: she served as the director of Feminist and Gender Studies for seven years; she was instrumental in getting the Slocum investigation initiated; she has given numerous talks on campus about sexual objectification; she has involved many CC students in research on sexualization and sexual; and she currently serves on the Title IX investigation team. In addition, she has been an expert witness in court cases related to sexual objectification, has been invited to speak at several national conferences, and has served on the sexual harassment task force for the Society for Personality and Social Psychology and on the sexualization of girls’ task force for the American Psychological Association. There is more, but let me here specifically address where her conviction and fortitude have recently shined the most, and why I am nominating her for this award.

In the last year, she exhibited tremendous courage when she spoke out as a former victim of Harvey Weinstein, setting the tone for the #metoo movement on the CC campus, helping others be more courageous about reporting their Title IX cases, and also showing young women that they could indeed walk out of a situation. She was more than a role model for just the CC community, however. Her influence expanded to the (inter)national level, as she appeared in many articles and in the media, speaking not only as an advocate for women but, perhaps more importantly, as the well-researched, scholarly voice on such matters. She helped raise a nation’s awareness of such issues, with the following but a small sample:

NYTimes: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/10/us/gwyneth-paltrow-angelina-jolie-harvey-weinstein.html>

Denver Post: <https://www.denverpost.com/2017/10/12/harvey-weinstein-harassed-colorado-college-professor/>

DemocracyNow: [https://www.democracynow.org/2017/10/12/tomi ann roberts on her encounter](https://www.democracynow.org/2017/10/12/tomi_ann_roberts_on_her_encounter)

Slate: <https://slate.com/arts/2017/11/harvey-weinsteins-accusers-in-conversation.html>

Colorado Public Radio: <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/colorado-professor-who-shared-story-of-weinstein-harassment-reflects-on-metoo-movement>

Third Rail with Ozy on PBS: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/third-rail/episodes/episode-6-is-sexual-harassment-inevitable-workplace/>

The APA Monitor: <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2018/01/conversation-roberts.aspx>

She has thus spoken out on a topic (e.g., sexual objectification) where people are, for good reason, often hesitant to speak out—indeed, we see this playing out on the national stage as I write this. I cannot imagine how hard this must be, especially when the topic hits so close to home. Nor can I imagine the fortitude it requires to be the voice for so many that have been silent for so long.

She has received accolades from her alma mater, Smith College, in recognition of her advocacy for women. I think it is time that CC acknowledges all that she has done for girls and women in this regard. It has been a long road and treacherous road to speak out on behalf of women, and she has been doing that for close to three decades, representing the best of CC to the world.

Innovation and Courage – Tomi-Ann Roberts (2 of 2 nominations)

I nominate Tomi-Ann Roberts for this award due to the amazing courage she showed in publicly identifying herself as a victim of Harvey Weinstein, even after decades of building an impressive career as a scholar and teacher, which required setting the incident aside, forgetting it, minimizing it, and all of the other coping mechanisms used regularly by survivors of sexual misconduct. When she found out that the various movie stars and other celebrities were stepping forward to make public complaints, she called the NYT and joined the chorus, knowing that she wasn't a celebrity, so it probably wouldn't matter, but that she was a scholar of gender and body shame, and other related issues. She could bring a unique perspective to the issue, and she did. Little did she know that she would be on every major news network and that her life would be overwhelmed with calls from the press. At the one-year anniversary this fall, she was bombarded once again. And as happens to most high-profile survivors, she became "Harvey Weinstein's" victim rather than the respected professor and expert that she had been BEFORE "coming out." That kind of public work wrecks your life in ways you don't anticipate, yet Tomi-Ann persisted. She then helped lead the effort to take down the name of Slocum from the residence hall, and has continued to inspire not just her colleagues, but students who have similar stories – SO many of them. Not sure her announcement was "innovative" in that the voices of the #MeToo Movement have become all too common, but this award in recognition of what Tomi-Ann did, not just for the HW case but for feminists on our campus and beyond, would be one way for those of us who work with her every day in the CC community, to say thanks for her courage.