



PRESS RELEASE
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Inspiration On Demand: Finding the Muse in the Mask

Ever wonder where artists find their inspiration? What's the story behind the creation? For the past six years, over 150 local artists and community members have been tapping into their creativity for the Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art (FCMOCA) *Masks at MOCA* exhibit. Every September, the artists show up at the museum to pick up their blank ceramic masks. By December, a completed masterpiece is returned to FCMOCA. But what happens during those weeks between?

Jim McGinnis, a pediatrician with Fort Collins Youth Clinic, has contributed five masks over the years. He actually starts thinking about his next mask just after he hands in the last one. "Opening the box is always a surprise because sometimes the mask shape changes one's plans or ideas, but I don't let that make much difference to me," he says. McGinnis puts a story to each mask he creates, and it becomes a reflection of life and his reaction to it. "The story makes the mask happen," he says. "This year, the story is about life being a quilt of experiences. Inspiration always comes from what you have experienced and enjoyed, and hopefully learned, about life. One year my mask was about an aunt who pushed the boundaries of living."



Kathy Bauer also looks to personal experience for her inspiration. A marketing executive by day, Bauer is a trained graphic designer and makes art during her free hours. But she and her family traveled a rocky road for a couple of years. That experience directly influenced her mask this year. "My anthem for those months was Bob Marley's song "Three Little Birds". My daughter and I sang it all the time." Then she bursts into song, "Don't worry 'bout a thing. 'Cause every little thing's gonna be all right — and it was. Those three little birds on my mask represent my hope and optimism during a very difficult time. I wanted it to celebrate getting to the other side."

Occasionally every artist hits a roadblock: a place with no forward momentum. The deadline is looming and a finished product has to be delivered. "Oh, Mark Twain said it best when he said 'If you have ignorance and confidence, you will probably succeed!' Jim McGinnis laughs. "My high school art teacher never believed I could be creative, and sometimes I think she was right. My mask is made of glass, which requires a little skill and a lot of luck to get the project to be what you want it to be."



Kathy Bauer concurs. "Opening that box and staring at the white face is an intimidating moment. I think I sucked all the oxygen out of the room when I did my first mask. Can I do this? What if I goof up? What if nobody bids on it? But it gets easier. Previous masks have been created with calligraphy, letterforms and typography. This year's is completely different. I abandoned the calligraphy and took out the paints. I used the bright Jamaican colors of yellow, red and green. That was the easy part. Then, the scary part – what if my hand slips? What if... In black ink, I wrote 'irie' which is Jamaican slang for 'hang loose.' The word extends across the mask and I drew the three little birds sitting on a wire."

More than a vehicle for expression, *Masks at MOCA* is one of the major fundraisers for the museum. Proceeds from past events have provided up to a third of FCMOCA's operating budget, making this a vital program. Each mask is part of a silent auction, with a live auction of selected masks at the Gala, which will be held on April 25th this year. Oak Street Plaza will be transformed under a tent, so partygoers can enjoy the outside space, as well as the museum's galleries. "Our space is so special and so unique, we wanted to make it part of the whole Gala experience," says FCMOCA's executive director, Marianne Lorenz. "Caldera Creative is making it a magical night, there will be a Flamenco guitarist, great food — it's going to be fun and festive."

Masks at MOCA opens on April 3rd during First Friday Gallery Walk and will continue through the entire month. The exhibit closes on May 1st, when the silent auction closes. "That night is so much fun," says Lorenz. "People show up to make sure they get the mask they want. Some have even stood guard by their masks so no one out bids them. It can get very exciting! Bidding stops at nine on the dot. We've seen some very happy people at that moment."

FCMOCA is open to the public Tuesday through Friday 10AM – 6PM and on Saturday noon to 5PM. Opening and closing receptions start at 6PM and end at 9PM. For more information about the Gala and to reserve your place, call FCMOCA at 970-482-2787 or go to FCMOCA's website at www.fcmoa.org.

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