



Press Release

SSU Sculptor Blends Political and Personal In Monument to Holocaust and Genocide

ROHNERT PARK, March 1 – About herself as an artist, Jann Nunn says “I address themes in my work that range from the intimately personal to the overtly political.”

Those two themes, often poles apart, are fused into one in the outdoor sculpture Nunn is now completing on the campus of Sonoma State University.

The piece, which will be a permanent work at the edge of a lake on the university grounds in Sonoma County, is a memorial to the Holocaust and world genocides.

On March 29, it is scheduled to be dedicated as the Erna and Arthur Salm Holocaust and Genocide Memorial Grove. The dedication will bring together representatives of victims of genocide including Jews, Armenians, Cambodians, Native Americans, Rwandans and others.

Nunn has been on the faculty of the Sonoma State Art Department 10 years. She is an associate professor of sculptor. She came to Sonoma State from the San Francisco Art Institute where she taught for three years after receiving a Masters of Finance Art degree.

Nunn was commissioned for the Holocaust memorial project in 2006 by the Alliances for the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide of Sonoma County.

The project is also being sponsored by the Center for the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide, an academic program of the Schools of Social Sciences at SSU for 25 years.

Nunn’s sculpture combines iron, glass, concrete, fired bricks, stones and light to speak to the most profound failure of mankind, genocide, and the imperative to eradicate such crimes against humanity..

Nunn’s message is conveyed by a 40-ft length of railroad track which emerge from a gentle rise above the campus lake, travel to the water’s edge where the rails nearly converge at the foot of a granite plinth from which rises a 12-ft. tall cylindrical tower fabricated from 5,000 pieces of glass.

The glass tower will be lighted by sunlight during the day and internal lighting at night.

The sculpture makes a large statement – the political – on top of hundreds of voices of the survivors and relatives of survivors – the personal.

"The narrowing distances between the tracks and the convergence into the lighted tower represent the hope that as civilization progresses and we learn from past errors there will be fewer incidents of genocide and holocaust," said Nunn.

Expressions of loss, grief and hope are made on bricks – 460 of them – that make up the ties that anchor the railroad track. The laser engraved memorials were purchased for \$100 to \$250 and carry the messages of victims and relatives who provide the human tragedies that are the work product of genocide. Though each story behind the message on each memorial brick is different, all of them are reduced to the essential commitment to remember.

One first generation Armenian-American said he purchased his personal memorial brick to honor his father who lost his family to the Armenian genocide in 1915. He also said the brick will at last provide a physical marker for his slain descendants whose bodies were never recovered.

"I want them to be recognized. These people didn't exist until Sonoma State put up this memorial. These people *did* exist," he said.

Nunn, who lives in Oakland, got the commission for the sculpture in April 2006 and she produced a design and plan several months later. Construction began in early 2007.

The project, which will cost about \$100,000, was funded entirely with private funds and in-kind donations.

Because it is on the property of a state university, it needed approval of campus officials as well as meet all the standards for permanent outdoor monuments built on public land.

Over the nearly three years of work, Nunn has been assisted by colleagues and students associated with the SSU Art Department and volunteers. Much of her building materials, including the glass, railroad tracks, concrete, and other supplies, was donated by local businesses.

Nunn obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, in 1988. She studied at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 1991, and received a MFA at San Francisco Art Institute in 1992.

Nunn said she entered school at the University of Alaska a confirmed painter.

"I realized I wanted to make my life as a maker of objects and images at the age of six. I can't remember a day before I began drawing," she said. "I gravitated toward painting

and planned to be a painter until I was forced – against my will – to take sculpture classes in college as part of my BFA requirements.”

“I was hooked immediately,” said Nunn who now, 20 years later, creates her art wearing steel-toed boots and a bright yellow leather welding vest and calculates art supplies in tons.

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Photos of Jann Nunn, the sculptor model , and work in progress available on request.