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Spokane-raised artist Jim Hodges to return for Visiting Artist Lecture Series

Sun., April 22, 2018, 8 a.m.



Jim Hodges, a Shadle Park High School graduate who now is based in New York, will return to his hometown this week as part of the Visiting Artist Lecture Series. (Luke Copping)

By Audrey Overstreet

For The Spokesman-
Review

SMS

If you go

Jim Hodges

What: As part of the Visiting Artist Lecture Series, the Spokane-born artist will narrate the film "Jim Hodges" and answer questions.

11:30 a.m. Thursday: Spokane Falls Community College, Building 17, 3410 W. Fort George Wright Drive.

6:30 p.m. Thursday: Gonzaga University, Jundt auditorium, 200 E. Desmet Ave.

Jim Hodges' ability to infuse emotion into the objects of daily life has brought him international fame in the art world. Karen Kaiser, curator of education at the Jundt Art Museum at Gonzaga University, remembers the Shadle Park High School graduate back when he was just a fellow art student at Fort Wright College.

In 1980, Hodges and Kaiser had studios across the hall from each other at Fort Wright. They bonded over their love of drawing and rigorous work ethics. They took turns napping on the ratty couch used to pull all-nighters.

Sister Paula Turnbull, Spokane's famous sculptor-nun who created the iconic Garbage Goat, allowed both students to keep their studio spaces open free of charge for a couple of years beyond graduation, until the school closed in 1982.

"I think she just liked having us around," Kaiser said. "It was exciting to be seen and have our work be seen, and have some kind of acknowledgment."

Hodges left Spokane to attend Pratt University in Brooklyn, earning his MFA in 1986. He stayed in New York, shaped by exposure to all the art he saw. He was also changed by witnessing friends and colleagues die as a result of the AIDS epidemic ravaging the gay community.

He branched out from painting and drawing into sculpture and mixed media installations. His explorations into temporality, fragility, love and death are keenly expressed through his art. The messages never feel heavy handed, conveyed through delicate artificial flowers sewn in wall sculptures or on doodled napkins arranged as a visual diary. From a massive stained glass mural to a heavenly skyscape created from cut-up thrift store jeans, Hodges makes you notice found materials for their unexpected beauty. He has sheathed giant boulders in lacquered stainless steel of dazzling hues and spun delicate-looking spiderwebs using chains to suspend in forgotten corners. Some pieces make you smile; others break your heart.

From 2013 to 2015 Hodges was the subject of a major touring retrospective, “Give More Than You Take,” which started in Dallas Museum of Art in Texas and toured to Walker Arts Centre in Minneapolis; Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston; and Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. In 2014 a text-based sculpture “With Liberty and Justice For All” was installed on the exterior of the new building at Aspen Art Museum in Colorado.

Hodges will return to his hometown this week to give two public talks as part of the Visiting Artist Lecture Series presented by Spokane Falls Community College, the Jundt Art Museum, Eastern Washington University and the Sahlin Foundation.

On Thursday, at 11:30 a.m. at SFCC, Hodges will show and narrate the film “Jim Hodges.” That evening he will show the film again at 6:30 p.m. in the Jundt auditorium. At both events he will answer questions and talk about a new community collaborative arts hub he is founding to give artists from varied disciplines, including musicians and dancers, a place to perform alongside artworks.

Kaiser said that Hodges continues to visit family and friends often in Spokane. There is a lot of history and pride in community when residents reflect on how far one of Spokane’s own has gone in his career.

“A lot of them are kind of surprised about his notoriety, but all of them saw his potential,” Kaiser said. “No one ever said about Jim, ‘What’s the big deal?’ ”

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