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PENINSULA NEWS



Exhibit offers cheeky view of city officials

Monday, March 16, 2009 | 10:12 AM

Bay City News

BRISBANE, CA — Brisbane residents will get a very fresh perspective on local elected officials Wednesday with the debut of an art exhibit featuring 10 community leaders' posteriors.

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In November, local artist and active community member Beth Grossman was invited to create an art exhibit honoring the opening of the new Brisbane civic center. A 12-year resident, Grossman said she wanted to do something outrageous to get residents' attention and get them down to city hall.

"I'm not your typical artist who makes pretty pictures to put up on your wall and match your couch," she said. "I like to create dialogue and involve the public in the process in some way."

The resulting "Seats of Power" exhibit is a testament to local officials' desire to draw residents to the newly remodeled civic headquarters, and perhaps to their sense of humor as well.

Grossman convinced 10 Brisbane dignitaries, including the mayor, police commander, fire chief, harbormaster and all five city council members, to let her photograph their rear ends, clothed of course, for the exhibit.

To capture these images, Grossman had each individual press their behinds against a sheet of Plexiglas. With the help of a jacquard weaving company, she used the resulting images to upholster 10 old chair seats she found at the dump.

The art will be hanging in the city's conference room. An interactive opening event will take place Wednesday from 5 to 8 p.m. at Brisbane City Hall, 50 Park Place.

Guests can sit in the "hot seat," an elaborate chair at the end of a red carpet, and share their thoughts on how it feels to be in a seat of power. Local filmmakers will document these moments for an ongoing film project.

The idea for the exhibit came to her, Grossman said, as she sat in the conference room and pondered what stories the chairs would tell if they could talk. From there, she imagined the chairs' vantage point quite literally.

"I guess they just see squished butts," she said.

The artist said she was surprised by the readiness to which the city manager agreed to her proposal. Once all four city council members were on board, Grossman said she had an easy time convincing the mayor, police commander, harbormaster, fire chief, head of planning and head of parks and recreation.

"I could have gotten more but I only had 10 chair seats," she said.

Her original idea involved a play on the age-old joke of photocopying one's posterior, but a few test runs showed this process knocks newer machines off balance, Grossman said.

The artist does not plan to label each rear end with the name of its owner, but she will include a quote from that person. Mayor Sepi Richardson is easy to spot because of her red dress, she said, and police commander Lisa Macias' belt is a dead giveaway.

"It's so not part of the dialogue whose pants they are," she said.

While the nature of the exhibit will naturally attract attention, Grossman said she hopes viewers will understand the fundamental message of encouraging citizens' participation with the individuals who sit in these chairs.

"The city council listens to who's there at the meeting," she said. "If it's the developer, the corporation and their lawyers and we're not there, they think we're OK with it."

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