

15 MINUTES

Sculptures of death, love and form

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
ewilliams@florida-weekly.com

A ceramic skeleton peaks out of a pile of dirt as if decomposing, on the floor of the Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center in downtown Fort Myers. Imbedded in the dirt are toys made in China. Florida Gulf Coast University senior Ashley Williams, one of 13 FGCU sculptors whose works are on display at the Art Center until March 17, created it.

The 24 year-old's bright, cheerful presence was a counterpoint to sometimes intense, dark and poignant visions.

"I worked with images from Darfur to make this," she said. The piece depicts the remains of a Darfur native killed by Sudanese rebels – a genocide the Chinese and Sudanese governments deny," Williams said. "What I'm attempting to do here is make a connection between what's happening in Darfur and the Chinese government... A lot of times people flee and are shot down and left to weather the elements."

Williams was gallery sitting at the Art Center last Sunday morning. She greeted

curious visitors who occasionally wandered into the airy, spacious room. The skeleton, she explained, was made of red earthenware clay and coated with a white veneer, to make it look real. An iron colored stain had been rubbed over the top.

"That's what gives that brown, weathered, metallic look to it," she said.

Her work often comments on social or political situations. Another piece involved empty cardboard boxes covered with black and white images of aborted fetuses juxtaposed with spare change. Williams had taken the pictures from a website called abortionno.org, but said her piece is not a comment on whether abortion is right or wrong, just an exploration of its effects on us all. The title: "Who murdered all the babies? Democrats, Feminists and Me." Williams said she is not politically affiliated, or a feminist.

"As soon as I saw the images I knew I wanted to do something with them," she said.

Williams used a copy machine to manipulate the size of the pictures. She chose empty cardboard boxes as an allusion to the womb, "because the reality is there's something there – and then there's not."

She left out the color to create visual detachment to the upsetting images.

"I think these images are manageable now," she said. "In color they weren't."

After the show is over, Williams plans to burn the boxes; she doesn't want them around anymore.

"It was a really hard project for me," she said. "It really pushed me over the edge – but that's what art's supposed to do. I can't

wait to set them on fire."

On the wall near the boxes is another Williams' sculpture called "Remains." It is composed of leftover skeleton pieces, discarded ideas about Darfur's genocide, connected to the wall by industrial size bolts. The sculpture makes no statement, she said; it is contemplation on the beauty of form.

"At night the lighting is so much better," she said. "And those bolts just gleam and it's really, really beautiful."

Williams's fourth work at the Art Center is the most personal of the four, because it describes her own broken engagement plans to a man who went away to law school in Chicago.

Organic compost, cow manure and peat moss are elegantly layered in a clear glass box; out of the dirt stands a sliced, moldy loaf of bread tied up in red string. This installation piece titled "Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fungus," cleverly describes the discouragement and alienation she experienced when that comforting cliché finally let her down.

"That absence, that space in between us, did not make my heart grow fonder," Williams said.

Nor his heart.

"We grew apart and it was horrible."

So this, then, was her closure piece to that relationship.

Williams moved to Fort Myers four years ago from Dayton, Ohio. She plans to attend the Chicago Art Institute graduate program, then create, show and sell her work.

"It's what I do," she said. "I feel like I really have to do it." ■



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO BY EVAN WILLIAMS

Ashley Williams, one of 13 FGCU sculptors whose works are on display at the Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center, and her creation, a ceramic skeleton in a pile of dirt.

If you go

- >>What: 13 Sculptors, an exhibit by FGCU students
- >>When: Friday March 14 to Tuesday, March 18
- >>Where: Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center, downtown Fort Myers. The opening reception is at 7 p.m. on Friday, March 14
- >>Cost: Free
- >>Info: www.fl-arts.org

Life is all about choices and this new year Triumph brings you new choices. Choices like do you want a new Bonneville, Bonneville T100 or a Scrambler?

Now it is even easier for you to choose! Purchase a new 2007 or prior year motorcycle and get your choice of 3.9% APR financing or up to \$1,000 of FREE clothing and/or accessories.*

The choice is yours, but hurry; this offer ends March 31, 2008!

**\$1,000 of
FREE GEAR
OR
3.9% APR**

**Triumph
Motorcycles of
Fort Myers**

16090 S. Tamiami Trail
Fort Myers, FL 33908

239-481-8100

www.gcmotorcycles.com

* Offer valid on new 2007 or prior model year of the following models: Bonneville, Bonneville T100, Scrambler, America, Speedmaster, Tiger, Tiger w/ABS, Speed Triple, Rocket III Classic, Trouser. See dealer for full details.

Go your own way
www.TriumphMotorcycles.com