

Art Matters

Creative cultural forms



By Janet Sellers

“Be a rainbow in someone else’s cloud”—Maya Angelou
Happy New Year, dear readers. One of my students sent me a clip of Maya Angelou talking about the people who have been rainbows in her life, and of course that changed my whole new year’s outlook to write about art for you. I’d like to think about what our art and creativity brings into the new year for all of us and share that idea. In the clip, Angelou explains that she “brings everyone” with her in her life: on stage, into her writing and classes and more. Also, that she is “never alone” because all her memories of friends are with her. That is vital to remember in the cold, dark winter times, especially for creatives. Not only for us as we go about our days, but also for our art that greets new and old friends in homes, offices, and museums if we are so lucky, and art venues of all kinds.

Many cities and nations have had centuries of looking at art integrated into their buildings, town squares, and corners. When we see that a human hand has touched and made something for us to look at and enjoy, it also touches us inside warmly, and that feeling lingers as long as we feel like resonating with it. We can recall artwork we’ve seen and enjoyed in memory and relive that, too.

In our area, we have a number of art venues that are unconventional and some that are conventional, such as galleries and dedicated arts venues. Our installed public art numbers over three dozen outdoor pieces with the benefit of Tri-Lakes Views and such sponsors. Each spring, Tri-Lakes Views holds a call for artists to submit sculptures for the annual exhibit spots all over our community. Stay tuned for the next call for artists, I think it is coming up very soon.

Our most precious and oldest—hundreds of years old—outdoor art forms in our community are in our local forests, particularly in the Monument Preserve. While the trees have been here longer than any of us, we have needed to be educated to notice and appreciate them as cultural art forms that we need to protect for future generations from misguided utility installations (we lost a wonderful tree to some power line installations that could have spared the tree), uninformed fire mitigation efforts (the older trees are fire resistant anyhow), and so on.

The ancient trees are greatly endangered by the ill-informed and we can never get the trees back if they are harmed in any way, because even the Indians no longer

know how to make the trees, what they mean in all their many details, and so on. All we know is that the trees are here, have sacred meanings and sacred origins, and must be protected now or we won’t have them in the future.

For many, the spirit trees, or Sacred Prayer Trees, have become a common sight nowadays thanks to increased attention by nature lovers in our area and authors such as John W. Anderson and his book, *Ute Indian Prayer Trees of the Pikes Peak Region*, and the many new “friends” of the trees Anderson has introduced through his informative walks and talks all over Colorado. He has a second book coming out this year, and I hear it is about a broader region of the Rocky Mountains and the spirit trees’ wider range.

Ute Sacred Prayer Trees in Monument Preserve

The easiest sacred trees for me to locate (I’m really good at getting lost in the forest but at the same time enjoying the adventure) are the Sacred Prayer Trees on the eastern side of the Monument Preserve, and there are many of these kinds of trees throughout the preserve as well as the forests of the Pikes Peak region. A number of the trees I have loved seeing there I learned about from Anderson’s informative walks, and they are confirmed Ute Indian culturally modified trees. We can easily detect their presence in the forest by noting the unusual leanings, bends, and shapes among the straight, skyward-reaching ponderosa pines.

The Ute Indians have, for many hundreds of years, modified ponderosa pines into shapes that reflect prayerful intention, and the trees were visited annually by the families who cherished them and what they embody in meaningful forms. Although some people today may not understand the mystery behind the trees as fully as the Native Americans who created them, it is clear that they are important living cultural artifacts to be protected and treasured by contemporary stewards of the preserve.

Often, the culturally modified trees also align with the stars, proving advanced celestial knowledge as well as relationships to navigating the Front Range and Pikes Peak. We are fortunate to have the Friends of Monument Preserve, right here in our area, and they are looking for helpers and volunteers. The group can be reached at www.fomp.org.

Call for artists

Tri-Lakes Center for the Arts—Artist call: *Visions of Light*; entry deadline is Jan. 16, exhibit dates Feb. 28 to



Above: A Ute Indian Prayer Tree is easily seen from the path on the east side of the Monument Preserve. Orange coloring in the bark denotes that it is hundreds of years old, and ponderosas can live to be 600 to 800 years old. *Photo by Janet Sellers.*

March 24. Contact Lynn Roth: lynn.pdphotographers@gmail.com or 719-649-4241.

Janet Sellers is a local fine artist, writer, and art teacher. She has public art and sculptures in many Colorado cities, local drawing and painting classes for all ages, and welcomes your art questions. She can be reached at janetsellers@ocn.me.

Snapshots of Our Community

Lions contribute to TLC, Nov. 28



Above: The El Paso County Tri-Lakes Lions Club presented a \$3,000 contribution to Tri-Lakes Cares (TLC) in support of its Healthy Choices Diabetes Prevention program on Nov. 28. Pictured, from left, are Peter Pintus of the Tri-Lakes Lions, Executive Director Haley Chapin of TLC, Development Manager Christine Bucher, and Dave Prejean, Tri-Lakes Lions president. Lions Clubs, also known as “The Knights of Sight,” is a worldwide service organization focused on assisting with vision challenges, including the Lions Clubs program KidSight for K-3 early vision screening and to help identify and resolve childhood and adult vision issues. We would love to chat with new volunteers in our Tri-Lakes community interested to come help everyone see into a better future. Our Lions Club International mission is simple: “We Serve!” See www.e-clubhouse.org/sites/elpasocl/ for more information. *Photo courtesy of Gordon Reichal.*

Monument Open House, Nov. 30



Above: On Nov. 30, the Monument Planning Commission hosted a Community Open House at the Tri-Lakes Chamber of Commerce to invite the public to provide their opinions on how Monument should grow. The event, which was open from 4 to 7 p.m., featured display boards on tables that lined the meeting room. Members of the committee working to update the Town of Monument Comprehensive Plan were on hand to staff each display and answer any questions. The firm Community Matters Inc. was hired by the Town of Monument to guide the update process, along with a 15-member Community Advisory Group of individuals from other community organizations, including the Lewis-Palmer Board of Education and the Triview Metropolitan District. Attendees had the opportunity to ask questions, review survey results and maps, and add their own comments and suggestions on the display. A presentation summarizing the plan review and update process is available on the Town of Monument website at <http://www.townofmonument.org/departments/comprehensive-plan/> along with a copy of the 2003 version of the Comprehensive Plan. Additional community meetings are planned for January, with a completion target of the end of February. *Photo by Jackie Burhans.*