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The doors, windows of perception

By Ani Amirkhanian

Whenever Karin Swidens looks at a door, she sees different levels of passages — for life. With that thought in mind, she sculpts clay into works of art that are meant to express a message of hope and optimism.

“Doors can open passages,” Swidens said.

“The whole thing for me is a metaphor for my searching of a spiritual idea.”

The Los Angeles-based artist has a series of about 35 clay pieces titled “Doors” that will be on display starting Friday at the Creative Arts Center Gallery.

The exhibit, “Windows and Doors,” will also feature the paintings of



Artist Karin Swidens stands with some of her work at the Artisan House in Burbank on Thursday. (Tammy Abbott / The Leader)

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LOS ANGELES TIMES

Jeanne Townsend and the photographs of Kathlene Persoff.

advertisement Swildens has been working on her "Doors" series since 1995.

She works with clay and sculpts pieces that have little resemblance to conventional doors. Instead, her sculptures look like structures or dwellings in a village with doors and windows incorporated in them.

"Because I see the door as a passage, a place where you go through, most of the sculptures have doors or at least openings," Swildens said. "There is always a place which you go through."

Swilden's artwork is personal and reflective, she said.

"The idea came about when I was in a tough place at one point," she said. "You are always in a tough place when you become inspired."

Swildens didn't let life's challenges get in the way of having a positive outlook for the future. She started pondering the saying "the light at the end of the tunnel," and one-by-one created sculptures that reflect the message of hope and optimism in that saying.

"I think that without sculptures I wouldn't be where I am or who I am," she said. "There are bits of me everywhere."

For the Dutch-born Swildens, sculpting became a part of her life when she moved to the United States.

Swildens lived in Morocco for 10 years and studied art in Paris.

She started drawing and painting first, but it wasn't until she moved to the United States that she tried her hand at sculpting from wood.

"She's just an expert at what she does," said Frances Santistevan, gallery director at Creative Arts Gallery Center. "She has a positive attitude about life and about everything in general. I think her sculptures, this series, shows a lot of that."

Swildens is one of three artists who will exhibit their work at the arts center.

Townsend will be exhibiting about 26 of her acrylic paintings, and Persoff will show her photographs.

Townsend's paintings of the ocean and nature represent the windows portion of the "Doors and Windows" exhibition, she said.

The natural world and the world within it are mirrors of each other, Townsend said.

"They start with an observation of the natural world, and then they just evolve from there," Townsend said. "Part of my exploration is that when you observe nature closely, you actually get to observe deeper parts of yourself as reflected in nature."

Although both artists work differ in style, they are somewhat similar in concept and open for interpretation.

“For me things in outer nature reflect inner nature, and I think that’s the one comparison,” Townsend said. “[Karin’s] work is pretty expansive and abstract. The thing that might pull them together, both mine and hers, invite the viewer to enter into a portal.”

Persoff, who also photographs nature, considers her work as having doors and windows for looking into the natural world.

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