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Tracy Otten, associate professor of studio art, collaborates with poet Annie Christain

Summary: Results of the unique creative process are on display as part of the P3 exhibition.

(December 7, 2009)-Tracy Otten, associate professor of studio art, is 1 of 25 regional artists invited to collaborate with a regional poet to create artwork and poetry on a shared theme. The results of the unique process are on exhibition at the Visual Arts Center at the Washington Pavilion in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, through February 28, 2010. Otten's So I won't forget and poet Annie Christain's [Orbs Whose Collective Sum Signifies My Age](#) are their contributions to the 2009 P3 exhibition.

Otten and Christain's creative process involved a long-distance collaboration. Otten, from Morris where she teaches printmaking, screenprinting, drawing, and 2-D design, and Christain, from Seoul, South Korea, where she teaches English, began by independently cutting words out of newspapers and periodicals. After randomly choosing words from their respective pools, they settled on 10 that resonated with both artists. Those words lead the partners to a passage from Daniel Pinchbeck's *Breaking Open the Head* that served as the inspiration for their work:

"An easier way for a highly advanced species to disseminate itself, McKenna suspected, would be through spores, the hardest organic substance, deposited on asteroids and sent spinning through the galaxy until they crash-landed on some suitable planet. To support this wild theory, he noted the peculiar shape of the psilocybin molecule. 'It is the only 4-substituted indole known to exist on earth...Psilocybin has a unique chemical signature that says, 'I am artificial I come from outside'"

[Otten](#), who earned a master of fine arts in printmaking from the University of South Dakota, has worked collaboratively with visual artists but never before with a poet.

"I began with the main goal of being as open to the process as I could, while remaining true to my own style," says Otten. "I think Annie and I worked really well together because we were both willing to work intuitively. We initiated the process with these rather random elements and then each responded to them in our own way. Our intention was never for me to illustrate her poem instead we were interested in our individual creative reactions to the same initial stimuli. So while I hope our audience can make some connection between the poem and my print, I am most fascinated by the differences."

Christain, who earned a master of arts in English from the University of South Dakota, developed an immediate bond with Otten. "Working with Tracy was refreshing because we both produced work that was a direct result of our method of collaboration: a variation of William S. Burroughs' cut-up technique. I really felt connected to Tracy and the project even though we were each in different countries communicating through e-mail only. I think the element of chance in the selection process of the words let our egos or conscious minds rest for a while, which gave us more room to hear and consider each other's opinions and ideas."

A recipient of grants and awards through the Lake Region Arts Council, the University of Minnesota, the Plains Art

Museum, and the Nebraska Fine Arts Council One Percent for the Arts, Otten's prints and mixed media collages have been shown in more than 80 regional, national, and international exhibitions in the past decade, including 13 solo exhibitions. Her work is in the permanent collection of 30 universities and museums.

Poems by Christain have been published in Bombay Gin, Arabesques Review, The American Drivel Review, and Beeswax Magazine, among others. She is the three-year recipient of the University of South Dakota's Gladys Hasse Poetry Award, and she received the 2007 and 2008 Jerry Bradley Award for Creative Writing at the Southwest Texas Popular Culture Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Photo: Detail of Otten's P3 print So I won't forget

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