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Mott art students' journeys to Fiji chronicled in multimedia exhibit

FLINT

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Contributing writer

In 2001 and 2004, Mara Jevera Fulmer took groups of Mott students to Fiji to give them a cross-cultural experience that would expand their perspectives, to show them "how we fit into the big world."

"Se(a) crossings: Time in the midst of the pressures of chaos," the result of these journeys, is now on exhibit at Mott Community College's Fine Arts Gallery.

The installation is a metaphor that invites the viewer to look at the world from different angles. The homophones in the title, "See" and "Sea," suggest the importance of seeking connections even across oceans, in spite of the chaos of life.

Fulmer, who was art director at the University of the South Pacific, came to Flint in 1997 to teach graphic design at Mott Community College. But her interest in the culture of the Pacific Islands never dimmed.

This remarkably complex multi-media exhibit consists of photographs, videos, audios and eight mylar and satin paper panels that hang from the ceiling; the panels suggest pages in a book. A "time" poem written by the artist is projected onto a sandblasted acrylic dome suspended from a grid by monofilaments; the voice-over speaks of the relationship of time and space. The text of a rhymed "time" poem is arranged on a large floor piece. Continuous watery sounds accompany the projected "splash" of water that shimmers on the wall.

Some of the panels show images of Flint that include flowers, but also the bleakness of life in the city's "hoods." These scenes are contrasted with Fiji

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scenes that show beaches, ocean waves, tropical downpours, all the "cliches of paradise" that are beautiful and yet disturbing.

In one panel, the viewer looks through the a silhouette of Fiji's palm trees to see an enhanced photograph of the brightly colored Flint labor mural on the side of a building at the intersection of Saginaw and Martin Luther King Streets. It is surrounded by a devasted landscape.

Although the scene is bleak, the mural could be interpreted as a "wake-up" call to action to the people of Flint.

On an adjoining wall is a photograph of a burnt-out building in Fiji that was destroyed during the political coup of 2000. Once a lighthouse, it now is covered with pro-democracy graffiti that calls for action, much like the labor mural in Flint.

The juxtaposition of these two diverse cultures, so different and yet so alike in their common humanity, points out the parallels among people all over the world and suggests the possibility of achieving new understandings in spite of the pressures of existence.

The artist will give a public presentation at noon Feb. 15 in room 129 of the Virtual Arts and Design Center.

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