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Cherry blossoms fill the Columbia Art Center

By Mike Giuliano

7:15 AM EDT, April 24, 2013

Art and poetry support a worthy cause in the group exhibit "Haiku for Hope," which is co-sponsored by the Columbia Art Center and Howard County Promotion and Tourism's Blossoms of Hope and Cherrybration. Proceeds go toward Howard County General Hospital's Claudia Mayer Cancer Resource Center.

Each artwork has an accompanying short poem that reinforces its inspirational themes. That inspiration generally is found in nature and, more specifically, a number of the artists and poets respond to the cherry blossoms that cheerfully light up the landscape in April.

Stylistic responses to the cherry blossoms vary from one artist to the next.

Paul Colombini calls your attention to the flower-coated trees by isolating them in his color photograph "Cherry Blossoms - Early Dawn," which sets those assertive pink flowers against a neutral gray background. The accompanying haiku by Cara Holman reads: "cherry blossom petals/ this quiet hour/ before dawn."

April Rimpo's approach is quite different in her watercolor "Springtime," which treats the floral profusion as intersecting pink zones. The three people depicted beneath the arcing tree branches prompted Poppy Harrin's haiku: "first cherry blossoms/ a little girl shares secrets/ with her baby doll."

Rather than depicting the open flowers, Joan Tarbell Plato's watercolor, ink and acrylic "Cherry Blossom" emphasizes a floral bud that has yet to open. The accompanying Tony Nasuta poem reads: "a new bud/ emptiness/ it's time to explore/ inside."

If many of the artists favor close-up views, Bonita Glaser's watercolor "Cherry Blossom Festival" gives a more panoramic perspective. This depiction of people strolling along the Tidal Basin in Washington is accompanied by a haiku by the poet Nasus: "Historic city/ Abloom with cherry/ blossoms/ lining festive streets."

Although most of the cherry blossom-celebrating artists have made watercolors, photographs or other works on paper, several opt to work in other mediums. Sarah Snowden's kiln-fired ceramic vessel, "Life Under the Weeping Cherry," has a painted side depicting an older woman seated under a cherry tree who is watching two young dancers. Roberta Beary's haiku reads: "in the middle/ of the widow's lawn/ weeping cherry."

Working in a sculptural mode, Ken Beerbohm's tabletop-installed stone and clay "On the Path" represents a lawn that supports a blooming tree, a path and a bench. The haiku by Charlotte Digregorio states: "on the path/ cherry blossoms in the/ breeze/ gentle me."

Besides all of the cherry blossoms, some of the artists depict other spring flowers or spirit-lifting natural subject matter. And there are a few artists whose nonrepresentational style prompts the poets to respond to abstract moods rather than to realistic figuration.

In Stan Wenocur's mixed media painting and collage "Moon Night," for instance, the artist's predominantly deep blue and black coloration conveys a darkly meditative mood. The accompanying poem by Tony Nasuta reads: "Solitude/ immersed/ in a fog/ a lone island."

"Haiku for Hope" runs through April 28 at the Columbia Art Center, 6100 Foreland Garth, in Long Reach Village Center, in Columbia. Call 410-730-0075 or go to <http://www.columbiaartcenter.org>.

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