



## For 7 artists, the medium is change

By Sarah M. Taylor, Globe Correspondent | July 16, 2006

Each of the seven women hails from a different country. Each has been through her own unique hardships. But collectively, the group is able to express their experiences, sometimes coming face to face with them again. An overall theme takes shape -- transitions and the realization that life goes on. So begins a new chapter in these artists' lives.

Joyce Collier Fearnside, Marika Barnet, Barbara Bartlett, Sirarpi Heghinian Walzer, Young Shin, Gabriele Stewart, and Pao Fei Yang make up the Metro-Lex Artists Group. All have prepared pieces for a coming exhibition titled "Transitions" at the Arlington Center for the Arts.

"For some of these members who go back to their country of origin, there's always something to deal with," said Fearnside. "Whether to say there are losses or rejuvenation, there are all kinds of things that affect us as a community, even though we are just seven people."

The group came together in 2000 when Fearnside worked at the Munroe Center for the Arts in Lexington. She would pass other artists in the halls and the idea blossomed of creating a group to critique one another's work, attend exhibits, and discuss issues relevant to their trade. The women went on what Fearnside calls "an artist's date," and now meet once a month.

"We came up with the idea that it was necessary to have an artist group where we can share and support each other," said Heghinian Walzer.

Coming together as artists, the women realized they had much more in common than art.

Fearnside, who is curator of the coming exhibition, said they noticed that as women they had all gone through various transitions. "One thing we've learned is what's constant is change," said Fearnside.

The personal experiences that women shared with the group range from losing a loved one to growing up in a country in political turmoil. Such experiences have appeared in their individual work, whether expressed intentionally or not.

“When I get to work I assume I’m just going to work out whatever drawings I’ve made and then you step back and look at the piece and say ‘Oh!’” Fearnside said.

Heghinian Walzer found deeper inspiration in creating her abstract mixed-media pieces after coming to Massachusetts from Germany.

“I have more colors compared to when I was in Berlin. I call those my gray days,” she said, adding that she’s been influenced by author Henry David Thoreau’s fondness for nature and Transcendentalism and enjoys working outdoors.

“I remind myself how life is beautiful if we allow it to be, how beautiful a tree is, a bark is,” said Heghinian Walzer. Yet she accepts the timeless reality that she and her peers face: “You can never be as good as nature as an artist.”

Fearnside noticed her artisanship change over the years as well as her outlook on life. She said her nature themes were depicted differently in her monotypes and prints after suffering from breast cancer.

“I used to have birds in trees 20 years ago. Now, not so much,” Fearnside said. She believes that whatever an artist is experiencing at the time of creating a work will inevitably show.

“On one level the work might not show the transition that I physically have gone through but subconsciously it has definitely been affected by it,” said Fearnside. “I think my new work is better than I could imagine.

She said the Metro-Lex Artists Group has been a support for her in recent years. “It’s something to look forward to, a continuance . . . something I can count on.”