

RX FOR ART

Harvard's medical history collection inspires Marshfield artist

By VALERIE A. RUSSO
For The Patriot Ledger

Bat fossils. Human skeletons and skulls. Bodies with splayed flesh. It's good material for a horror movie and even better subject matter for a new art exhibit at Harvard Medical School. The artist is Dorothy Simpson Krause from Marshfield.

Krause is the first artist-in-residence at Harvard Medical School's Countway Library in Boston, home to one of the top medical history collections in the world. For the past year, she has been combing the archives in search of anatomical specimens, medical artifacts and illustrations in rare books that would spark her creativity.

The results? Thirty works of art incorporating Krause's photographs of the collection. An exhibition of her work, "Ars Longa - Vita Brevis" (Latin for "art is long, life is short"), along with some of the artifacts she photographed, opened this week. A reception will be held Nov. 10 in Gordon Hall.

"I've pushed a lot of boundaries with this show; it was fun," said Krause, a pioneer in digital printmaking, founder of Massachusetts College of Art's Computer Arts Center and coauthor of "Digital Art Studio: Techniques for Combining Inkjet Printing With Traditional Art Materials" (Watson-Guptill, 2004).

ART PREVIEW

ARS LONGA - VITA BREVIS

An exhibit by Dorothy Simpson Krause, Artist-in-Residence at Harvard Medical School. At the Countway Library of Medicine, 1st floor, 10 Shattuck St., Boston, and Gordon Hall, 3rd floor atrium, 25 Shattuck St., Boston, through Dec. 9. The exhibit at Gordon Hall is open by special arrangement. The exhibit at the Countway Library is on view to the public through Feb. 3, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. weekdays, no appointment necessary. For more information, see countway.med.harvard.edu/index.shtml.

An opening reception will be held 4-6 p.m. Nov. 10 in Gordon Hall. RSVP by e-mail to DotKrause@DotKrause.com.

"When I'm thinking about what's going to sell on Newbury Street, I have a different mind set - not quite so irreverent," she said.

The idea for the show came from a conversation with Kathryn Baker of Scituate, manager of Special Collections at the Countway Library.

"Kathryn was saying what a great collection they had. The more we talked about it, the more it sounded like there would be interesting images to work with," said Krause.

Harvard's collection contains approximately 13,000 items, including the ether inhaler used in the first ether-assisted operation performed at Massachusetts General Hospital by Dr. John Collins Warren in 1846. Some artifacts are displayed on the fifth floor of the library, in the Warren Anatomical Museum.

Once the artist-in-residency project was approved, Krause visited the library's enormous storage facility just outside Boston and selected objects to photograph - the fossil of a bat, an anatomy instructor's model of a pelvis, phrenology busts of a so-called fanatic and assassin (in the 19th

century, the bumps on one's head were thought to govern character), X-rays of the jewelry-laden wrists and hands of Czar Nicholas and Czarina Alexandra of Russia, as well as illustrations of skeletons and muscles in centuries-old medical books.

Staff members wearing gloves arranged the fragile materials in a makeshift booth for Krause and her studio manager, Mary Taylor, to photograph.

Back in her Marshfield studio, Krause manipulated and combined the digital images and used a wide range of printing techniques and materials. She enlarged the image of the bat to 36 inches and printed it in three sections - called a "triptych" - on textured non-woven fabric treated with metallic pigment. She printed "Gautier Women" on gold metallic paper to give a rich look to the illustrations of splayed flesh (opened to show the body's interior) done by French book illustrator Théophile Gautier in the 19th century.

"I thought his illustrations were gorgeous, although the subject matter is not something you would ordinarily



Courtesy photo

Dorothy Simpson Krause's art exhibition is called "Ars Longa - Vita Brevis," Latin for "art is long, life is short."

think of as being beautiful," she said.

Krause also incorporated objects from her own collection of ephemera. "Caledonian" shows the silhouette of Dr. Heberden (the physician who treated King George III during his bouts of madness) surrounded by an old insurance policy that Krause picked up at a yard sale. "Paranoia" contains three layers of images: the

phrenology bust of a woman who had been afflicted with paranoia; the text of an invitation to a lecture on phrenology at the Boston Athenaeum in 1832; and an antique dress from Krause's collection.

In "Man," Krause has inserted photographs of five views of the human body in glass slots hanging from a metal stand she found at the

Marshfield flea market. In "CastHands," she affixed photographs of a cast of human hands onto plaster poured in two wooden auto parts boxes - a fool-the-eye play on the original.

"Nothing is quite what it was when I saw it," she said. "Some of the objects were a little off-putting. I tried to humanize the collection."