

THE BIG BEND *Sentinel*

Installation Forgets Not the Masonic Lodge Starting Monday Emily Jo Cureton 22 September 2011

MARFA – If the walls of the Masonic Lodge could talk; oh, the secrets they'd tell.

The austere space has seen a century of civic life and yet, little tells the story besides an inconspicuous plaque on the corner of Highland Avenue and Texas Street in Marfa. Freemasons tend to be tight-lipped, especially when outsiders like visiting artist Sarah Cain start rooting around for tales from the past.



But LA-based Cain came to Marfa especially to create a site-specific installation at the Masonic Lodge building, now an arts and event space. The show, "Forget me not," opens Monday, and is the first installment of a larger project by Los Angeles Nomadic Division, or LAND, which features eight artists, set to present their work back to back in Marfa from now in to 2012.

Cain has worked like mad over the past two and a half weeks to deck out the cavernous ground floor of the building with large-scale abstract sculptures and paintings, adding a contemporary layer to the mysterious mix of history, mysticism and art brewing on North Highland Avenue.

Her practice "focuses on creating site-specific painting that responds directly to the environment" and "investigates physical, emotional and psychic space".

So, what does that mean?

In this case, Cain takes painting in to three dimensions, while a sense of history introduces the fourth: time.

The forget-me-not flower is the artist's departure point. The flower became a symbol of Freemasonry in Nazi Germany, when an estimated 80,000 Masons were either imprisoned or killed. Members of the fraternity, both in and out of the concentration camps, began wearing the forget-me-not instead of the traditional square and compass on their lapels as a mark of identity. During WWII the Nazis unwittingly co-opted the flower for their own flair to signify charity.

Cain's installation plays on the duality of this symbol during a very dark time.

Serendipitously, the Masonic Lodge building in Marfa was also formerly the home of a flower shop.

“Whatever is a problem becomes a source for a starting point,” Cain said of her process.

The inevitabilities of the space are co-opted and integrated in to her larger than life abstractions. For example, botched stretcher bars provide the framework for an ephemeral shadow sculpture. A battered old cabinet, ugly to boot, becomes part of a sweeping wall mural.

Cain grew up in a little town in upstate New York, and was cognizant from an early age of the tension between local culture and high art. She’s been doing site-specific installations in old buildings for over a decade now and her work in Marfa ranges from the subtlety of shadows playing in a corner to unapologetic gilded gaudiness.

All of it is big, bright, energetic and totally open to interpretation, despite the bleak historical narrative that set the artist to work.

“The central concept in Freemasonry is that you have to believe in anything. I was trying to take it to the point that the Supreme Being could be art,” she said, “I’m okay taking what I can from it. I’m an abstract artist and I work in abstraction because of the freedom it allows. If I know what I’m doing I don’t see the point in doing it.”

Show is by appointment from September 26 until October 6. Email info@nomadicdivision.org to set up a time. After October 6, it’ll be open to the public Thursday to Sunday from noon to 6pm.