

Community News

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Delaware native's art garners attention in Japan

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B. Chrise Harwanko has been exploring different forms of art and design ever since she was a young.

In high school at A. I. du Pont, it was leather craft, and as a college student her interest turned toward painting and design. It was not until she moved to Panama in 1979 that she became fascinated with batik, a type of cloth that is manually dyed using a wax-resistant dye.

"Watercolor began to interest me during my 25 years in Panama and the two media were sometimes mixed," said Harwanko. "When I moved to Japan in 1999 to work as an art teacher I began using wax resist on paper and included Japanese materials."

Her abstract paintings have gained recognition throughout Japan, so much so that they have been featured in the

prestigious Okiten Juried Art Show.

The show kicked off March 19 in the Urasoe Sports Complex, and according to Harwanko, it is a tremendous honor to be juried into Okiten.

"There was a 'Nyu-sen' award for this honor, meaning 'worthy of exhibition,'" the artist said. "There were 400 paintings that were entered and I was told about 100 were juried in. Last year I was awarded a 'shorie-sho,' a top achievement award for entering four underwater photographs."

The showcase ended on Sunday, April 3 and Harwanko was in the company of other talented artists displaying their glass, wood, textiles, calligraphy and graphic design works. But no other artist exercised the same techniques as Harwanko – her use of wax resist, ink, acrylic, latex and spray paints.

"The paint rose from the canvas due

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to the heating process I used," she said.

Regardless of her unusual tactics, the Japanese love her work.

"I have had many complements," she said. "It is a work that really needs to be seen in person as it is large and much detail is drawn on the lighter areas with a special pen."

Harwanko is currently the Bob Hope Primary School art educator and teaches art to kindergarten through second grade at Bob Hope Elementary School in Okinawa, Japan. She ended up in Japan when the Panama Canal was signed over to the Panamanians, which meant that all U.S. Government bases and activities would close.

"This included the U.S. schools called Department of Defense Dependents Schools who I work for," Harwanko said. "I was given the choice of Japan when everything closed down."

Although Okinawa is approximately 1,100 miles from the areas struck by the tsunami, Harwanko said Okinawans are heavy-hearted when thinking of their neighbors from the North.

"Everything here is running normally except many U.S. military members de-



ployed to help," she said. "Some Okinawans are waiting for the report of loved ones lost, some students have come temporarily to our schools here...because his parents voluntarily evacuated here."

But one of the things Harwanko loves about art is the healing process it can have on people.

"Art always plays a part in a recovery process of something this large," she said. "Artists, whether visual, vocal or performing, help heal by putting their thought into their specific process."

She also enjoys seeing her young children flourish in her class and takes pleasure in seeing her students excel in the arts, especially if they struggle in



LEFT: B. Chrisse Harwanko standing by her piece Where the Earth Meets the Sea, which hung in Okiten Juried Art Show in Japan. KARIN MORDT PHOTO
ABOVE: Painting from the last 12 months entitled Sunset Eclipse. B. CHRISSE

HARWANKO PHOTO

academics.

Even though her career is thriving, Harwanko plans on retiring at the end of next year. She plans on moving back to Panama with her two children, but not retiring to a life of leisure.

"I do plan on painting most of the time at my ocean front home on the Pacific side of Panama," she said.