

Local artists, authors collaborate on coloring book

By [Megan Bennett](#) / Journal North Reporter
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Sienna Heinemann's drawing was created for Melody Sumner Carnahan's short story, "(BREATHE)." Both are featured in Axle Contemporary's Local Coloring project. (Courtesy of Sienna Heinemann)

SANTA FE, N.M. — Sienna Heinemann was sitting and drawing at a local diner a few months ago when two local gallery owners, Matthew Chase-Daniel and Jerry Wellman, sat down near her to interview another artist.

The two use cafés like Counter Culture on Baca Street as “traveling office spaces” because their gallery, Axle Contemporary, is the back of a van.

It was at Counter Culture that the three struck up a conversation. The chance encounter led to Chase-Daniel and Wellman inviting Heinemann to participate in a project showcasing New Mexico writers and artists.

“They saw my work and thought I would be a good fit,.. it was a really good, symbiotic meeting,” she said.

The Local Coloring project she took part in has become a recently published coloring book. It includes short stories from five authors and 67 correlating black-and-white drawings from professional and amateur illustrators.

Chase-Daniel and Wellman were inspired by rising popularity of adult coloring books and said they wanted to take it one step further by adding in storylines and a “universality,” Wellman said, that allows their book to appeal to both children and adults.

An opening reception will take place tonight from 5-8 p.m. in the mobile gallery, this time parked in front of the New Mexico Museum of Art just off the Plaza.

“We’re always trying to find new, surprising ways to show art through our gallery that aren’t the white-wall gallery exhibitions,” said Chase-Daniel.

Like Heinemann, other artists were invited to be part of the coloring book, while some answered an open call from Axle Contemporary. The people who applied and were assigned stories to illustrate ranged from well-established artists with whom the gallery had worked previously to high school students. Chase-Daniel and Wellman ended up using all the submissions.

The story authors – Melody Sumner Carnahan, Joe Hayes, Nasario Garcia, Lily Hoang and Jamie Figuerora – were invited into the project in February. Their charge, according to Chase-Daniel, was to provide stories “rich with imagery.”

While Garcia used his New Mexico roots to craft his story about a Santa Clara boy, others used past experiences or derived them from folklore. And not all the stories are new. Hayes, known for decades of storytelling sessions on Museum Hill and around northern New Mexico, said he has been telling his tale of a coyote wanting to dance with a star for the past 30 years.

Sumner Carnahan, a Santa Fe-based author, used notes from a trip to Barcelona to create her story “(BREATHE),” which describes various animals, people and scenery she saw in the Spanish city. The artists assigned to illustrate the story chose different elements to illustrate. “People picked up on things I would have never imagined,” Sumner Carnahan said.

Heinemann, who was among those who illustrated “(BREATHE),” said she took images described by the author and visualized them in symbolic ways. Because the story mentions Cupid, she puts arrows through the main character’s hair. Instead of drawing swans that are highlighted in the story, she placed small feathers above the woman’s head.

“It’s more exciting for the viewer to notice the little details ... details that took more time to see,” said Heinemann. “It’s more satisfying that way.”

Axle Contemporary’s owners said they knew they would get a wide variety of styles of art, both among the various stories and within a single story. But all of the visuals have something that the readers will recognize after reading the short stories.

“If you look at most coloring books, they’re almost all the vision of one illustrator,” said Wellman. “This is a really wonderful way of [expanding] it.”

A reading and book-signing will be in the Museum of Art’s courtyard on Aug. 27. Coloring books and the artists’ original drawings will be on sale in the mobile gallery this month.