

Artist likes to make ordinary 'extraordinary'

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By GARY DEMUTH

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Whether it's a playground slide, seesaw, coffee table or billboard, artist Karyn Olivier likes to make the ordinary extraordinary.

During her career, the 43-year-old Brooklyn resident has connected two playground slides face to face to create a "collision" in the middle, built a 40-foot-long seesaw and challenged viewers to find a way to balance on it, and created a coffee table with attached columns that rise to the ceiling.

Olivier also has rented billboards and taken photographs of whatever landscape was behind it, then pasted the "behind" photo on the front of the billboard, "so it renders the billboard invisible," she said.

It's all part of Olivier's efforts to take ordinary objects and force viewers to see them in a new way.

"I'm taking what's familiar and shifting the way we see it," she said. "I'm taking something exact and loosening it to make you see it in a new way."

Olivier is the current artist-in-residence of the Salina Art Center. She will be living and working at the Art Center Warehouse, 149 S. Fourth, through May 29.

Olivier will have open studio hours at the Art Center Warehouse from 2 to 4 p.m. May 12, 15, 19, 22 and 26. She also will give an artist presentation on her works and current residency during an artist talk at 7:30 p.m. today at the Salina Art Center, 242 S. Santa Fe.

Grew up in Brooklyn

Born in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Olivier said she grew up in Brooklyn embracing two very different worlds.

"My household was very Caribbean, but we were right next to New York's orthodox Jewish community," she said. "It was two different worlds, but we all got along."

Olivier attended Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, but didn't major in art. Instead, she received a bachelor's in psychology in 1989.

"I came to art rather late," she said.

After graduating from Dartmouth, Olivier became a retail store manager at Urban Outfitters in New York City while trying to decide what to do with her life. After taking a ceramics class, Olivier decided to quit her job and embrace her artistic muse.

She enrolled at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., where she earned a master's of

fine arts in art in 2001.

Doing multimedia works

During the last 10 years, Olivier has been acclaimed for her multi-media work in ceramics, photography, video and public installations.

Her work has been exhibited throughout the world, including the Museum of Fine Arts and Contemporary Arts Museum, both in Houston; Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, N.Y.; The Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh; and the Gwangju and Busan Biennales in Korea.

She also has been awarded numerous awards and grants, including a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship and a Joan Mitchell Foundation Award.

Olivier currently is an assistant sculpture professor at the Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia.

Altering viewpoints

Because she didn't come to art until age 30, Olivier said she feels more comfortable working with familiar objects and finding ways to alter the way people see them.

"We go through our routines in life, and we're very myopic," she said. "How do I make people take a second glance?"

During her stay in Salina, Olivier said she will travel around the city, looking for inspiration to make "some sort of public activation."

"I'm going to the Smoky Hill Museum, riding the (CityGo) bus and just exploring the city to see what inspires me," she said. "I'm looking for blind spots I can insert something into."

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