

NOT 2 BE MISSED

Artist threads ire about oil into work

By William Kates
ASSOCIATED PRESS

DEWITT, N.Y. — Jennifer Marsh was sick of paying high gasoline prices and bothered by the abandoned gas station that was an eyesore on the drive to her studio each day.

So the Columbus native, who is an aspiring artist and inspired activist, came up with an idea — to cover the gas station with a colossal hand-made blanket to bring greater attention to the world's dependency on oil.

"I really tried to find a good balance of art and politics. I don't want it to be just a political statement. And I don't want it to just be a sculpture," said the 27-year-old Marsh, who received a bachelor of fine arts degree in sculpture from Columbus College of Art & Design in 2004 and is finishing her master of fine arts degree at Syracuse University in New York.

"I wanted to startle people so they would stop and think about (oil) ... and be inspired to make up their own opinions about the situation and how it has affected their community," Marsh said.

With the help of professional and amateur artists from 15 countries and more than 2,500 grade-school students in 29 states, Marsh covered the 50-year-old former Citgo station — pumps, light stands, signs and all — with more than 3,000 fiber panels that are crocheted, knitted, quilted or

stitched together.

The panels cover 5,000 square feet and come in every color, hue and texture. There are panels in burlap, leather, even silk. Some carry scenes; others, written messages: "Give me oil or give me death."

Some of the more imaginative panels are made with the labels from plastic beverage containers, plastic shopping bags and plastic six-pack carriers — all petroleum products.

A nearby kiosk explains the project, called WRAP, for World Reclamation Art Project.

Bulgarian artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude are among those who have received global attention with their outdoor public art. In 2005, the pair put up more than 7,500 door frames draped with orange fabric along 23 miles of foot-paths in New York City's Central Park.

Marsh became interested in using sculpture as social medium after a volunteer trip to Dharmasala, India, several years ago. To pursue her ideas for community-based art projects, Marsh founded the International Fiber Collaborative.

"This is much more meaningful than making objects in the studio with the door closed, and has so much more impact than any of my sculptures could have in a museum or gallery," Marsh said.

The project cost about \$29,000, much of it her own money. Some was covered by grants and contributions from individuals and businesses.



KEVIN RIVOLI | ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jennifer Marsh's collaborative approach has transformed an abandoned gas station in New York into an art exhibit, with panels created by thousands of people from 15 countries and 29 states. The Columbus native's work blends art and politics, she said.

Marsh's plan had been to cover a barn, until she drove by the gas station one day in March 2007 and had an impulse. She tracked down the station owner and got permission to use his property. Then she went to the DeWitt Planning Board to get approval.

Richard Robb, DeWitt's commissioner of development and operation, said the planning-board members at first thought Marsh's idea was humorous. Then they became skeptical. But as they talked

with Marsh, they realized she had a well-conceived plan.

"Our board is not known for going for the offbeat like this, but they said, 'By all means,'" Robb said. "We've been pleased about it. ... We've certainly heard a predominance of positive feedback, especially once people understand what it's for."

The aging station, which closed four years ago, sits on a traffic island at a neighborhood crossroads, just down the road from the neatly trimmed,

Syracuse University-owned Drumlins Country Club.

A steady stream of people stop to look at it, town officials said. Parents stop with their children. Local schools have brought classes to see the building. The blanket went on in mid-April and will stay on through mid-July.

Friends told Donna Lacey about the dressed-up gas station.

"It's a great project," said Lacey, a 45-year-old service coordinator for the disabled.

"Aesthetically, it's wonderful. It's so colorful and vibrant. And what a cool way to make a statement."

There are about 200,000 abandoned gas stations in the U.S., according to Marsh's Web site. There are also bigger projects potentially out there as well — bridges, smokestacks, empty grocery stores.

Marsh says her next WRAP will be in Huntsville, Ala., where she will move in July for a one-year teaching position at the University of Alabama.

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