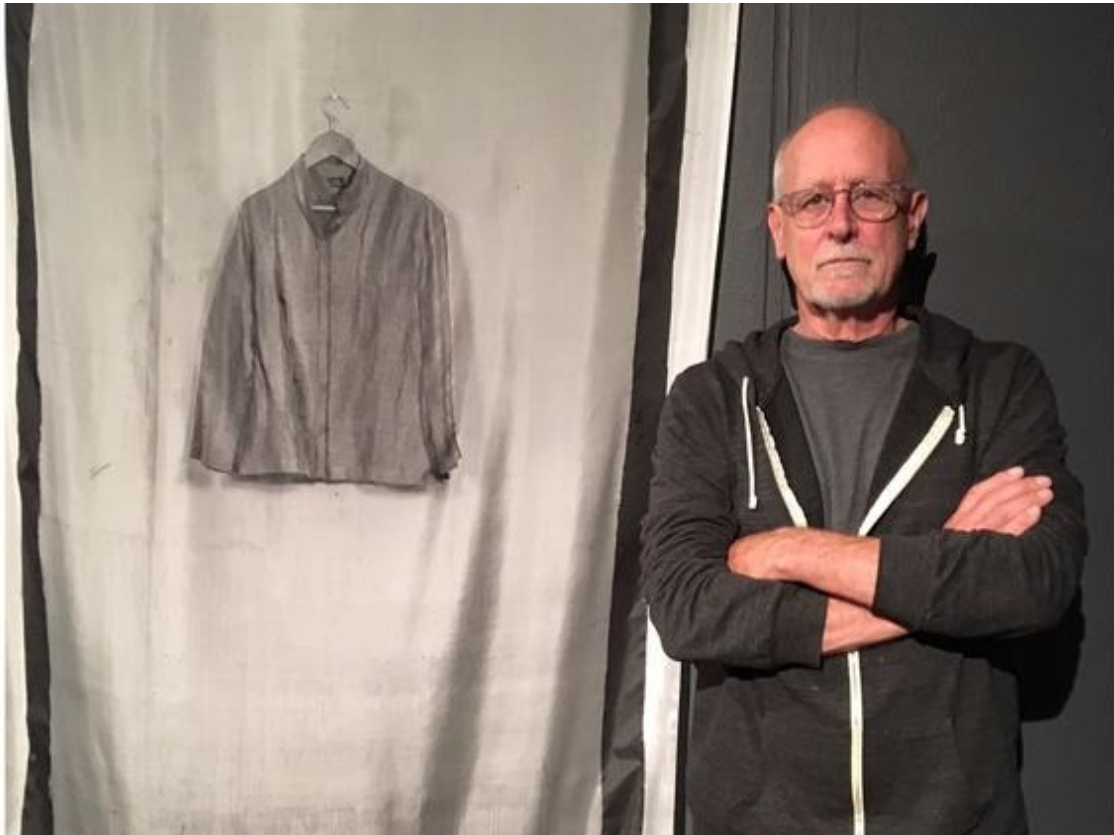


Artist memorializes his late wife with 'Air Becomes Breath' exhibit



Artist and professor Richard Turner stands next to a work he created in honor of his wife, Sylvia, who died from pancreatic cancer. Turner conceptualized "Air Becomes Breath," an installation in her honor that will run till Thursday at Santa Ana College. (Photo by Richard Chang)

By **Richard Chang**

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Artist Richard Turner has created plenty of memorials during his career but none has been as personal as this.

Turner's "Air Becomes Breath" exhibit at Santa Ana College's Main Art Gallery honors and remembers Sylvia Turner, the artist's late wife of 48 years. She died in May 2016, after struggling with pancreatic cancer.

Sylvia Turner was a longtime professor and dean at Santa Ana College (SAC). She served as the college's dean of fine and performing arts from 2008 to 2013. Before that, she served as SAC's associate dean of fine and performing arts. An accomplished professional dancer and choreographer, she also taught dance and chaired the dance department.

Sylvia Turner was known for her impeccable taste in clothing and chic sense of style. With help from photographer Mike Farrel, one of Sylvia's former students, Richard captured her best-remembered outfits and printed them in black and white on identically-sized banners of silk.

The result is an exhibit that's both somber and celebratory.

Two fans turn and intermittently blow air toward the silk prints, breathing life and movement into the works, and giving further meaning to the show's title, "Air Becomes Breath."

The exhibit title also comes from the book "When Breath Becomes Air" by Paul Kalanithi, which chronicles the neurosurgeon and writer's struggle with stage IV metastatic lung cancer.

"So many of us have had experiences with the clothing of our parents when they've died, the clothing of a spouse," Richard Turner, 74, said during a recent interview in the gallery. "So this experience of what do you do with somebody's clothing after they die is a pretty widespread experience, particularly for people who are my age or even younger."

Richard Turner, an Orange resident, is a professor emeritus at Chapman University, where he taught contemporary Asian art history and studio art for 41 years. He also served as co-director of Chapman's Guggenheim Gallery.

"This is what I wanted to do — share the experience of Sylvia with friends and our daughters," he said. "I asked them to pick out the pieces of clothing that best exemplified Sylvia's sense of style."

Out of 50 original images, Sylvia Turner's friends, daughters and husband narrowed the selections down to 14, which are on view in the college's Main Art Gallery through Thursday.

The works include images of formal attire and casual outfits, including mother-of-the-bridal dresses from Sylvia Turner's two daughters' weddings, dresses she wore to work at Santa Ana College, and an outfit she took while traveling abroad with Richard.

A simple, solemn composition by Philip Glass plays in the gallery on loop during operating hours. The gallery walls are painted black, contrasting naturally with the white silk banners.

"It's my hope that this piece is universal," Richard Turner said. "I hope it's accessible enough that people who know nothing about Sylvia, nothing about myself, our marriage, our children, could look at this and participate in their own way in the grieving or mourning process, whether it's something fresh in their minds or something that happened a long time ago."

Richard Turner is no stranger to memorial art.

d," which honored victims of the Cambodian
1 the SAC art gallery in 1984.

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ies" (1986), "Memory's Vault" (1988), "Anaheim Veterans Memorial" (1999), "See Angkor and Die" (2009) and "We Too Were Once Strangers" (2015), a Japanese American farmers memorial in Santa Ana.

Richard Turner has crafted dozens of other public art projects as well.

Over the past two months, Richard Turner's latest exhibit at Santa Ana College has quietly drawn students, staff and faculty who remember the dynamic dean and champion of the arts, who served on the board of Arts Orange County and several committees for local arts organizations, including South Coast Repertory, the Bowers Kidseum and the Orange County School of the Arts.

"This really just hits home," said Phillip Marquez, chair of SAC's art department and gallery director. "I remember some of these outfits that she's worn. I feel almost like it was necessary for it to be here, especially the first show, because Sylvia dedicated her career to the school. It's very important that we honor her here."

Richard Turner hopes to take this show on the road, and share with others the experience of life, loss, grieving and acceptance.

"Some people say they feel her presence, and others say they feel her absence," he said. "So I feel like it works. It does what it's supposed to do."

If You Go

What: "Air Becomes Breath"

When: Through Nov. 9; hours are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Wednesdays

Where: Santa Ana College Main Art Gallery, Building C, 1530 W. 17th St., Santa Ana

Cost: Free

Information: (714) 564-5615 or visit sac.edu/art

Richard Chang is a contributor to Times Community News.

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