

DOROTHY STANG CENTER SPEAKER SERIES BRINGS AWARENESS AND POSSIBILITY

Question: What do elephants, the arts, water privatization, human suffering, and social change have in common?

Answer: All were topics of the Dorothy Stang Center's Speaker Series that we inaugurated this past spring in honor of Sister Dorothy's own quest for social and environmental justice through awareness and engagement.

Miranda Loud, founder of Nature Stage and the Elephant Project, kicked off the series on March 22 as she spoke to an audience of nearly one hundred guests from the university and general peninsula communities. Addressing the horrific treatment of the Asian elephants that she helps to rehabilitate and comparing it to the manner in which impoverished and disenfranchised people of the world are all-too-frequently regarded; Loud then connected this concern with the ways in which the arts can be used to promote social change. Using music, photography, visual art, film and video animation to make her points, Miranda reminded the audience that "Elephants have been around a lot longer than human beings. As unprecedented economic, political, and ecological changes unfold at shocking speed, the human species can learn much from them about community and survival." The elephant, Loud maintains, endangered in Asia, threatened in Africa, and neglected in captivity around the world mirrors the interdependence of people and nature while in combination with various art forms, provides us with an emotional understanding of our place in the world. It is from this emotional, heart-felt place rather than our cognitive capacities that we are likely to advocate for change locally and around the globe for *all* living beings.

One of the students who attended Loud's presentation summarized her impression by saying, "I couldn't imagine how she would draw together art, elephants, people, and social change but she did it masterfully."

Another said, "It was the perfect example of the connections between empathy education, arts, and respect for all animals including humans. Also, I loved her energy, whimsy, and compassion. Her two-hour talk flew by."

Miranda Loud's blockbuster presentation was followed by another on April 19 when Water Resources Engineer and Water Quality Control Manager, Alexa La Plante, addressed another packed house on the topic, "Water, Water...Nowhere." Using the title as a play-on-words for the time-held assumption that potable water supplies exist all around us, La Plante spoke from the perspective that access to clean water is a basic human right. She addressed the increasing scarcity of this vital resource statewide and globally, empathizing that the problem is privatization and profitization of the existing supply. One individual in attendance observed, "This was truly an eye-opener. I didn't

realize that corporations like Cargill and Coca-Cola are literally stealing the water table out from under third-world communities leaving them to suffer from dehydration and disease caused by water contamination while something so basic to life is being made profitable for so few. It's a travesty!"

Alexa also discussed the response of the United Nations to this crisis and shared her own experiences with the Hinkley (California) Groundwater Remediation Project (think, Erin Brockovich!) and as a water contamination investigator in Costa Rica. "I liked the way she provided us with some ways we can get involved in changing things," said one student. "I left Alexa's presentation feeling empowered by the possibilities for getting involved and creating change both socially and environmentally."

Most certainly, that is the vision of the Dorothy Stang Center and Sister. Dorothy herself.