

'Woman's Work' : Exhibit inspires roundtable discussion about to-do lists.

DAVE MASON, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

September 29, 2010

Don't be afraid to say "no."

That message was repeated several times as women gathered at a Santa Barbara "Woman's Work" exhibit roundtable and talked about "to-do" lists.

Instead of trying to tackle it all, use to-do lists to set priorities and embrace your passions, emphasized the participants in a discussion Friday at The Frameworks Caruso Woods Contemporary Art Gallery on Anacapa Street.

"I expected everyone to say (a to-do list) is a curse and burden," Santa Barbara artist Anne Luther, who led the 10 women in the talk, told the News-Press later. "Instead, they said it was a tool."

Women visiting the gallery have written their "to-do" lists on small pieces of paper that have been attached to "Too Many To Do's," one of Ms. Luther's assemblages featuring a dress form. It's the interactive part of the exhibit, which began Sept. 1 and runs through Saturday. Some slipped their ideas under the gallery's door when it was closed.

Most were scraps of paper, but one list goes several pages. It was written by Christi Westerhouse, 42, co-owner of The Frameworks, whose desk is just a few feet from the assemblage. "I keep adding to it every day!" she said.

"I get up in the morning, and I'm running until 10 o'clock at night," said Ms. Westerhouse as her young daughter played behind her during the roundtable discussion.

One woman frustrated with to-do lists simply tore a chunk out of a scrap of paper and attached that to the tree, Ms. Luther said. Most, though, listed things that Ms. Luther noted really matter: "Get more rest," "Read more," "Laugh more," "Hug my husband," "Kiss my husband" and "See friends more often."

"Imagine having to make a to-do list to laugh more and have more fun," Ms. Luther said, adding that such a list reflects just how busy women's lives have become.

Also on women's lists were: "Take yoga lessons," "Say 'no' more often" and "Be myself." Another woman wrote: "Love, love, love." Also on the lists was "Make time for art."

One woman simply wrote, "Do less."

"That speaks to all of us," Ms. Luther said.

She tacked on her own "fantasy list" for things to focus on: "Eat pray love." But Ms. Luther, who read the book of that name four times and has seen the recent movie version starring Julia Roberts, said that, in reality, her to-do list is 16 pages. She uses it to manage three businesses — art, marketing and antiques that she sells at stores.

"Anne, you have so many passions!" said Santa Barbara interior designer Adele Rosen during the roundtable discussion, prompting



"Kiss my husband" and "Love, love, love" are among what women consider important on their "to-do" lists on "Too Many To Do's," the assemblage of a dress form hanging at The Frameworks Caruso Woods Contemporary Art Gallery on Anacapa Street. COURTESY PHOTO



Assemblage and collage artist Anne Luther holds a card showing her piece of a clock and a woman with a rolling pin. The actual piece hangs in the window of The Frameworks Caruso Woods Contemporary Art Gallery, where Ms. Luther's exhibit, "Woman's Work," is on display. THOMAS KELSEY/NEWS-PRESS

laughter. Besides her work, Ms. Luther has been a volunteer for various nonprofits and has chaired the Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara luncheon.

"It's hard for me to say no," Ms. Luther admitted.

But Sally Chiu, 66, a Santa Barbara artist, said she tells people no. " 'No' is huge. I've learned what I can do and what I can't do."

"In four years, I'll be 70. I wanted to be a really good painter," Ms. Chiu said about making art her priority.

Ms. Rosen noted, "I've narrowed down my list to what I'm really passionate about."

She later gave the News-Press examples such as good friends and her other job as program coordinator of Beyond Tolerance, a Santa Barbara County Education Office program dedicated to teaching schoolchildren about discrimination.

As for helping nonprofits, Ms. Rosen said, "It's OK not to be at every social event."

The women discussed the pressure of balancing careers and families. Dr. Sarah Vaughan, 62, a Santa Barbara materials scientist, said it is hard to be a mom and run a laboratory. After one day at work, she bought minced pies at a grocery store and passed them off as her own by putting them on a serving dish for an event at her daughter's school.

Some of the other women around the table laughed, nodded and said they've done the same thing with other sweet treats.

What's amazing, said Santa Barbara author and marketing consultant Erin Gaffy, is that as time-saving conveniences and appliances have multiplied, women have become busier with their to-do lists. She noted their grandparents made all their own clothes and didn't have microwave ovens. "But it doesn't seem like they had the stress we have."

Santa Barbara artist Pamela Larsson-Toscher, 62, addressed that. "One thing is we have more opportunities and more choices." And more choices, she said, means more for the "to-do" list.

Finding time for art at home is a challenge for women, she continued. She said she finally told her kids that there would be days when she wouldn't be able to drive them home from school or make them dinner by the usual time because she would be busy painting. She said her kids were supportive.

There was the day, though, when no arrangements were made to get them home, Mrs. Larsson-Toscher admitted. "My husband came and said, 'It's dark outside. Where are the kids?' He had to go to the school and pick them up. My daughter came home and said, 'Mom, was it one of those days?' Oh, the guilt!"

"But I want to be a good artist, and I can't be that unless I'm allowed that time," she said.

Priorities also work in the other direction. "I was talking to a single parent who's a fellow, and he decided he could only work half-time and be a parent," said Marie Profant, a Santa Barbara single mother and managing partner of VisualTravelTours, a company selling multimedia travel guides.

And actually, to-do lists can be pleasant, as Dr. Vaughan showed when she talked about doing something again.

"Go to Paris — it's on my list."

e-mail: dmason@newspress.com



Ms. Luther, center at back, leads a roundtable discussion about the thrills and perils of "to-do" lists at the gallery. THOMAS KELSEY/NEWS-PRESS



"The Princess Elevator Operator" is among the pieces in Anne Luther's exhibit. She said she wanted to honor "women who are not applauded for the work they do. She (the operator) should embrace that 'menial' position and see it as important and valuable." THOMAS KELSEY/NEWS-PRESS

IF YOU GO: Santa Barbara artist Anne Luther has created "Woman's Work," an exhibit of 37 collage and assemblage pieces based on the subject, on display through Saturday at The Frameworks Caruso Woods Contemporary Art Gallery, 813 Anacapa St. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. Admission is free.

Ms. Luther, who has a master's degree in fine arts from Parsons The New School of Design in New York City, said she wanted to address working women besides the usual high-profile CEOs. Wives, mothers, homemakers, doctors, volunteers, administrators, elevator operators, Internet geniuses, etc., all make contributions.

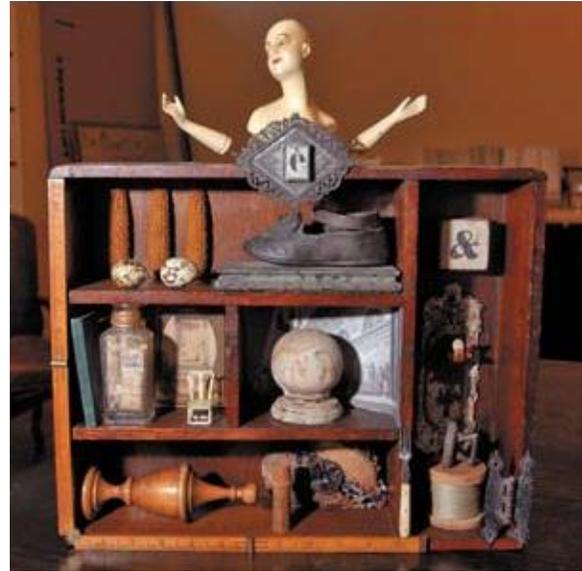
She was inspired when she saw a series of embroidered samplers by modern artist Ellen Reichek in 1999 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, where Ms. Luther lived. She recently looked at an old catalog from the show, which got her to thinking about the work grandmothers did.

Included are collages of women inspired by the working women on AMC's Emmy-winning series "Mad Men," set on Madison Avenue in the 1960s, and mixed media canvases using fabric, quilts and embroideries. Ms. Luther also made assemblage pieces emphasizing cooking, cleaning, writing and jobs such as operating an elevator.

On the walls of the exhibit are quotes from poet Maya Angelou and singer Peggy Lee. There is also an interactive portion featuring Ms. Luther's assemblage of a dress form covered with to-do lists submitted by women exploring the exhibit.

Admission is free. Assemblage pieces are selling for \$400 to \$600, collages \$175 to \$900.

For more information, call the gallery at 965-1812 or go to www.anneluther.com.



"The Home Maker" assemblage piece by Ms. Luther features the things women have done. On the left is a bottle containing the emotions and thoughts that women keep bottled up. On the right, a baby's hand reaches through a keyhole. THOMAS KELSEY/NEWS-PRESS



Left: Another piece by Ms. Luther is "The Writer." The feathers represent quill pens, and the key is for unlocking writer's block and the ideas that writers share with their readers, Ms. Luther said. The letter "B" refers to her friend, Barbara, a writer. Right: "The Magician Was A Woman" is a collage piece by Ms. Luther. "It's a representation of women and shows their affinity toward nature," Ms. Luther said. THOMAS KELSEY/NEWS-PRESS

