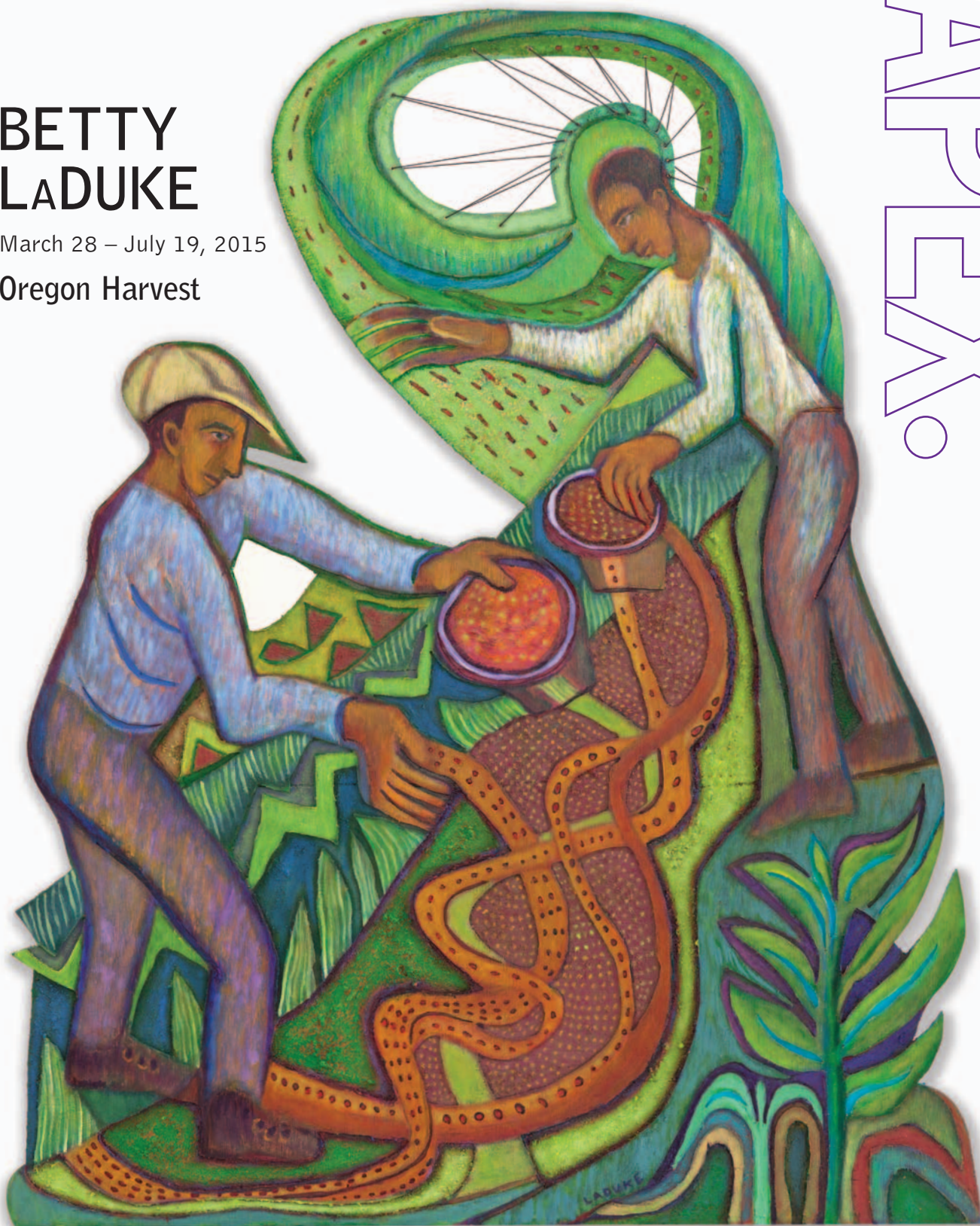


# BETTY LADUKE

March 28 – July 19, 2015

Oregon Harvest



APPEX!





Flower Harvest, 2014



Pear Harvest Dptych, 2012

## APEX: BETTY LADUKE

### Oregon Harvest

Born in the Bronx, New York, to Russian and Polish immigrant parents, Betty LaDuke knew by the age of nine that she would be an artist. At 82, she remains actively engaged in an artistic practice inspired by the lives of working men and women in developing countries around the globe.

LaDuke graduated from the High School of Music and Art, New York, and studied in Denver and Cleveland before receiving a scholarship to the Instituto Allende in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. That experience would whet LaDuke's appetite for travel and seed her lifelong devotion to world cultures. During three years in Mexico, she met artists Rufino Tamayo, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, whose dedication to an art representing indigenous working people continues to influence LaDuke's

output. Like the Mexican muralists, her early paintings drew upon the modeled forms and earth tones of European Cubism and Expressionism. And like the muralists, her style evolved to embrace the intense colors and flattened, pattern-rich compositions of native art and craft. Her most recent series, *Oregon Harvest*, celebrates Oregon's agricultural bounty and the workers who plant, tend, and harvest it. Whether depicting laborers in vineyards, orchards, or fields, her bright colors and shaped wooden panels energize her compositions and reflect the dignity of those who sow and reap on Oregon's fertile farmland.

Returning from Mexico in 1956, LaDuke taught at several schools and colleges before accepting a teaching post at the art department of Southern Oregon University (then Southern Oregon



College) in 1964, where she was the second woman art teacher and, for eighteen years, the only woman in the Art Department. There, she initiated courses on women in art and art in the third world, and her painting themes included the American Civil Rights movement.<sup>1</sup>

LaDuke traveled to Europe in 1956 and 1959, and on sabbatical in 1972, she travelled alone in India for a month. Thereafter, her extensive travels took her almost exclusively to developing countries in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. LaDuke has a special interest in the condition of women in the countries she visits, as well as in agrarian workers, craftsmen, and tradespeople who supply the food and products that allow their cultures to develop. She spends countless hours sketching from life, and each trip leads to the production of a series of works reflecting the lives of the people she has visited.

The artist travels abroad less frequently now, and her most recent series is rooted closer to home, with Oregon's Latino farm workers and the diverse food crops they cultivate providing fertile subject matter for her shaped plywood panels. Her series, *Oregon Harvest*, is especially pertinent as the Pacific Northwest's Latino population is increasing and controversy over the politics of immigration continues. The subject enables the artist to celebrate and champion her worldview right at home. LaDuke says about her hours spent in the fields:

"As I paint I connect with the workers – Raul, Alejandro or Felix as they bend, kneel or harvest long rows of kale, spinach, squash or strawberries. I also paint teams of seasonal workers that return for the annual pear and peach harvest. Sometimes, as ladders are climbed and buckets emptied into bins, workers pause to glance at my work, the sketches I make of them. Some approve, 'que bien!' Some wonder 'why not camera? for better, faster results?' I enjoy our brief dialogue and interaction. I'm especially pleased when the panels featuring local agriculture are on public display in our community, and the dialogue broadens from the enjoyment of bright colors to the meaning of the work that brings us fresh, local food. My art is inspired by the grower's investments, risks and vision, and the seasonal and year-long work of their dependable workers."<sup>2</sup>

Throughout her career, LaDuke's art has embraced a style and content reminiscent of the American Regionalism espoused during the time of the Great Depression. Exaggerated, caricatured form and heightened color are used expressively to portray the working class. However, LaDuke's global view reaches far beyond the chauvinism of American Regionalism fostered by artists such as Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry. Unlike the Regionalists, she does not glorify the strength of workers as symbols of American superiority. Rather, she tells the workers' story through an art with broad common appeal, bright color,

texture, and imagery that simply and directly presents the activities depicted. The pure color and rhythmic pattern she employs reflect the folk art traditions of the countries she has spent her life visiting. The repeated shapes of leaves, vines, and fruit echo texture and patterns associated with the world's indigenous arts. LaDuke's panels evoke textiles, carvings, and painted decorative objects from Mexico and Guatemala, Mali and Eritrea, aboriginal Australia and Papua New Guinea.

LaDuke's work is illustrative and documentary, political and spiritual. It is not an art for art's sake like the Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Minimalist movements that reigned supreme during the artist's formative years. From 1953 through the 1970s, LaDuke claimed a position cognizant of, but outside the dominant spectrum of modern art, even though stylistic nods



(detail) Marigolds Triptych, 2015



Grape Vine Training 1 (Miguel), 2013

to artists like Francis Bacon, Willem DeKooning, and Ben Shahn are evident. LaDuke's sixty-five year retrospective exhibition mounted in 2013 at the Schneider Museum of Art at Southern Oregon University elegantly demonstrated the clear progression of the artist's vision away from contemporary art movements. It proved that while she was always informed about current styles and ideas, she consciously and consistently chose a different, more narrative path — one that was and remains mostly peripheral to mainstream aesthetics. LaDuke's has always been an art of cause and conscience. Her work asks the viewer to value and celebrate the beauty of other cultures, while recognizing humanity's enduring hardships. In 2009, she wrote that her images, "(both personal and political, past and present), ... bridge people as well as continents. We are one."<sup>3</sup>

— Bonnie Laing-Malcolmson  
The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Northwest Art



Sketch: Pear Tree Pruning, 2014

<sup>1</sup> Oregon Historical Society, *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, Betty LaDuke (American, born 1933), online.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from artist's book project draft, *Oregon Harvest*, Betty LaDuke

<sup>3</sup> LaDuke, Betty, *Shaped Images*, essay for her exhibition at the Hanson Howard Gallery, Ashland, Oregon, March 2009.

## BIOGRAPHY

Betty LaDuke (American, born 1933) resides in Ashland, Oregon where she is professor of art emeritus at Southern Oregon University, having taught there from 1964-1996. Born to emigrant parents in the Bronx, New York, at age sixteen she enrolled in the High School of Music and Art in New York City. Upon graduation, she continued her education at the University of Denver, the Cleveland Institute of Art, and the Instituto Allende in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. In 1963, she graduated from California State University in Los Angeles with a special secondary art teaching credential and a master's degree in printmaking. LaDuke has exhibited widely around the United States including at the Schneider Museum of Art, Ashland, Oregon; Brauer Museum of Art, Valparaiso University, Indiana; University Museum, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces; Dallas Museum of Art, Texas; The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago; Chattanooga African American Museum, Tennessee; Indianapolis Art Center, Indiana; and the Albany Museum of Art, Georgia. Her work is represented in public collections including the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, Oregon; Brauer Museum of Art, Valparaiso, Indiana; Rensselaer Newman Foundation and Cultural Center, Troy, New York; Heifer International, Little Rock, Arkansas; Portland Art Museum, Oregon; and the Rhode Island School of Design, Museum of Art, Providence. LaDuke has received numerous awards such as the Oregon Governor's Award in the Arts (1993) and the National Art Education Association's Ziegfeld Award for distinguished international leadership (1996). The artist thanks her studio assistant, Barney Johnson, for his fine work cutting and routing the plywood panels.

## APEX

An ongoing series of exhibitions featuring emerging and established artists living in the Northwest. Presenting contemporary art in the context of the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Center for Northwest Art, this program continues the Museum's 120-year commitment to exhibiting, collecting, and celebrating the art of the region. APEX is supported in part by The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Endowments for Northwest Art, The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, and the Exhibition Series Sponsors.



PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

COVER: Earth Cycle, 2014

## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions: Height precedes width precedes depth

All works courtesy of the artist.

### Border Crossings, 2015

Acrylic and sand on plywood panel  
56 x 48 x 2 inches

### Marigolds Triptych, 2015

Morning  
Acrylic and sand on plywood panel  
48 x 20 x 1/8

### Noon

Acrylic, sand, and waxed thread on  
plywood panel  
48 x 24 x 1/8

### Afternoon

Acrylic and sand on plywood panel  
48 x 20 x 1/8

### Earth Cycle, 2014

Acrylic, sand, and waxed thread on  
plywood panel  
48 x 36 x 1/2 inches

### Flower Harvest, 2014

Acrylic, sand, and waxed thread on  
plywood panel  
48 x 36 x 1/8 inches

### Kale Harvest, 2014

Acrylic and sand on plywood panel  
48 x 34 x 1/8 inches

### Kale Weeding, 2014

Acrylic and sand on plywood panel  
48 x 36 x 1/8 inches

### Parsley Harvest, 2014

Acrylic and sand on plywood panel  
56 x 48 x 1/8 inches



Sketch: Kale Harvest, 2014

### Radish Harvest, 2014

Acrylic, sand, and waxed thread on  
plywood panel  
56 x 48 x 1/8 inches

### Transitions, 2014

Acrylic and sand on plywood panel  
42 x 18 x 1 1/8 inches

### Grape Vine Training 1 (Miguel), 2013

Acrylic and sand on plywood panel  
48 x 32 x 1/8 inches

### Grape Vine Training 2 (Miguel), 2013

Acrylic and sand on plywood panel  
48 x 22 x 1/8 inches

### Pear Tree Pruning 1-4, 2013

Acrylic and sand on plywood panel  
62 x 24 x 1/8 inches, each of four  
panels

### Grape Harvest Frenzy (diptych), 2012

Acrylic and sand on plywood panel  
56 x 48 x 1/8 inches, each panel

### Pear Harvest Diptych, 2012

Acrylic and sand on plywood panel  
63 x 48 x 1/8 inches, each panel