

arts

LEARN MORE ABOUT MK GUTH AND THIS PROJECT 
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Artist MK Guth asks: What would you protect?



"I'm interested in how identity is shaped through collective experiences and storytelling," MK Guth says.

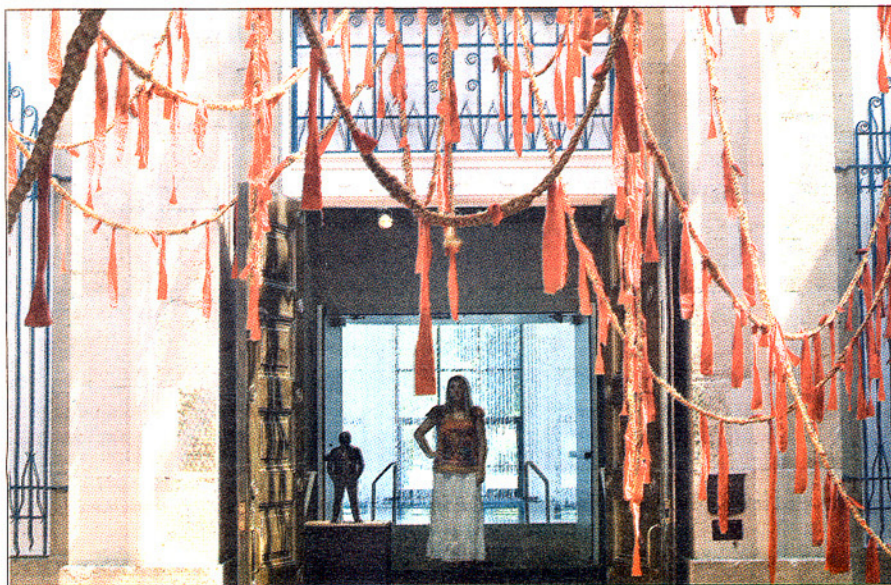
"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair, so that I may climb the golden hair."

Where the fairy tale leaves off, the art of MK Guth begins.

"We tell it over and over again, as a group, and we consume this information individually, even though it is held collectively," Guth said, on a stop over in Boise last week. "I'm interested in that in-between space. How we hold things in a collective manner and individualize them simultaneously."

That idea has fueled this Portland-based artist's work for a while now and has inspired her latest piece, "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping," that is taking over the atrium at the Boise Art Museum.

The piece, an 1,800-foot synthetic braid devours the space like vines in a jungle or Spanish moss in a swamp. Red felt ties rest on the ground or dangle in the air. Walking through it is an experience, because it creates an environment



Photos by **DARIN OSWALD** / doswald@idahoStatesman.com

Artist MK Guth stands beneath her latest project, "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping." The project traveled to six U.S. cities in three months. One was Boise, where people participated in the project by writing what they felt was worth protecting on a ribbon. The ribbons are woven into braids on display at the Boise Art Museum.

that surrounds the viewer.

Guth was invited to create the piece for the Whitney Biennial, put on in June by the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. It is one of the most anticipated and controversial contemporary art shows in the country.

She created the braid to fill the library space at the Park Avenue Armory, a former military installation that has become a cultural center.

"I wanted to create something that would consume that site," Guth said. "An armory means

something to us and the library is the heart of it. I reduced that to the notion of protection, which is much more all-encompassing than discussing issues of war, which is very loaded right now. While I knew this piece would hold political concerns, I wanted it to be universal enough that everyone could address it without jumping immediately to the Iraq War."

So she asked people in Portland, Boise, Houston, Atlanta, Cleveland, Chicago and New York City: What is worth protecting?

Their answers, written on the

small red banners that are woven into the braid and dangle from its form: little china tea cups, 35mm film, our children, neighborhoods, architecture, freedom of speech.

Her piece was well-received in the show, which is a feat in itself. The Whitney is one of those shows critics and artists love to hate.

Seeing her work in the armory had a particular resonance.

"In this space all the voices started to consume and take over a

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Now through Sunday, Sept. 14, Boise Art Museum, 670 S. Julia Davis Drive., 345-8330, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. Extended Thursday hours: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. \$5 general, \$3 college students and seniors, \$1 grades 1-12. Free for children 5 and younger and members and current Boise State students with a valid student ID through Aug. 21. Free on First Thursdays.

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MK GUTH

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particular place and replace the historic notion of protection with a more contemporary one," she said.

The idea of the braid came from her work with the "Rapunzel" fairy tale about a young girl held captive in a tower. While she is there, her hair magically grows to extreme lengths and can be used to climb the side of the tower.

"For me, the braid exists as a dual metaphor. It is a vehicle for escape, and it represents the time spent, entrapment," Guth said.

The communal work creating the braid also is part of the piece, offering an ephemeral quality to the experience.

"This is a sculptural object and the interaction people had with it, that kind of goes away, like this conversation we're having right now," Guth said. "I'm going to remember my version of it. You're going to write about yours, and what we're having that is shared becomes individualized and then is lost."

This piece holds the residue of that experience that created it. You can touch it and move through it in what Guth calls a "post-Minimalist experience."

This showing launches a tour of the piece.