

'The Cosmic Walk' — African tapestries of life

BY ED BOWERS

IMAGINE walking down the streets of the Tenderloin, where hundreds of people at odds with each other are going their own way, and then an anonymous, sneaky creature comes up to you on the corner of Turk and Hyde, and whispers into your ear where you can go to get a real connection with the universe.

He's not selling crack or ice or heroin. This product can be observed for free. The faceless creep tells you to go to 230 Hyde St., home of Faithful Fools, walk in the door, go up the stairs, and observe 31 beautiful tapestries created in South

Africa to educate people to the fact that not only can art be entertaining and provocative, it can also be enlightening and educational, its original function in the first place. Called The Cosmic Walk, the exhibition was commissioned by the Faithful Fools ministry eight years ago.

One of the first tapestries I saw at this exhibition, which closed in early 2009, was called "Huge Unfolding of Energy Fire," full of disembodied smiles, curlicues, and ecstatic, mischievous fires on a black background, black being the basis of all life, which is a mystery beyond religion, politics or mental conception.

Next was "Cosmic Self-Organizing Connectiveness," a tapestry with a beautiful, radiating spider web inlaid with a wool and weave of precious jewels. I hate spiders. But I can appreciate them now because of this work. The project artists turned something I find repulsive into a symbol I find profound.

Another tapestry was covered with statements such as, "Energy is released to the surface as light and heat."

These creations combine facts, expressed in words, with visual stimulus, possibly the most effective way to make education fun and let intelligence dance.

They document everything from dinosaurs to sexual procreation to

goddess worship to nuclear physics to the expansion of the universe. The Cosmic Walk is, in fact, the story of the universe.

Each tapestry takes an aspect of human consciousness and history, biology and scientific discovery, and plays with it like a Dizzy Gillespie solo on a simple song that can be turned into an epiphany of sound, causing the listener to become curious about what will happen next on the tapestry of life.

South African women in the Kopanang Women's Group in South Africa created the tapestries to communicate their life experiences while acquiring income-generating skills as part of the Sithandizingane Care Project of Geluksdal, South Africa.

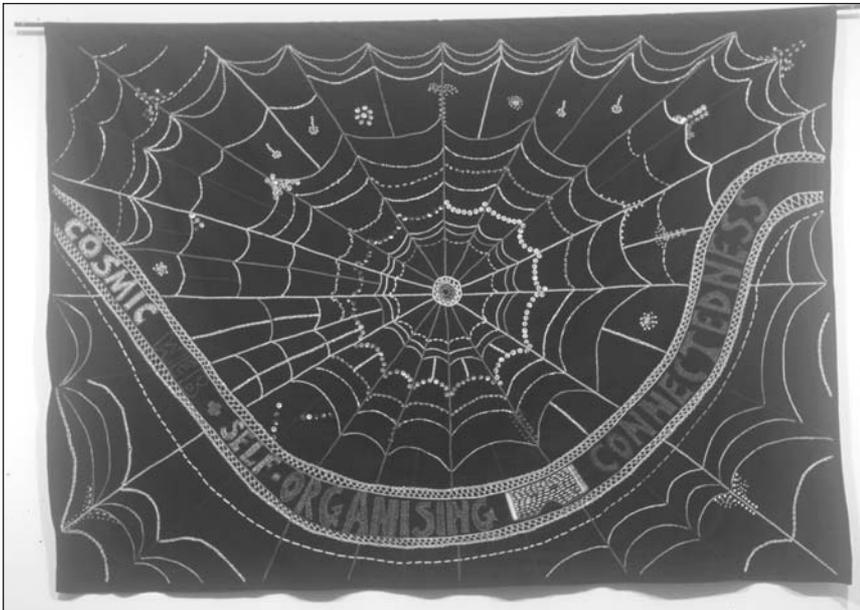
The proceeds from the sale of works like these, as well as quilts and handmade paper items, provide a life-sustaining income to women and families involved in this project and help support children with HIV/AIDS, many of them orphans.

Africa is decimated. It is your mother, the mother of consciousness in the human world. Yet many South African women and their children have to walk five miles to get a jug of water to survive one more day. Then they have to walk back five miles to drink the damn thing.

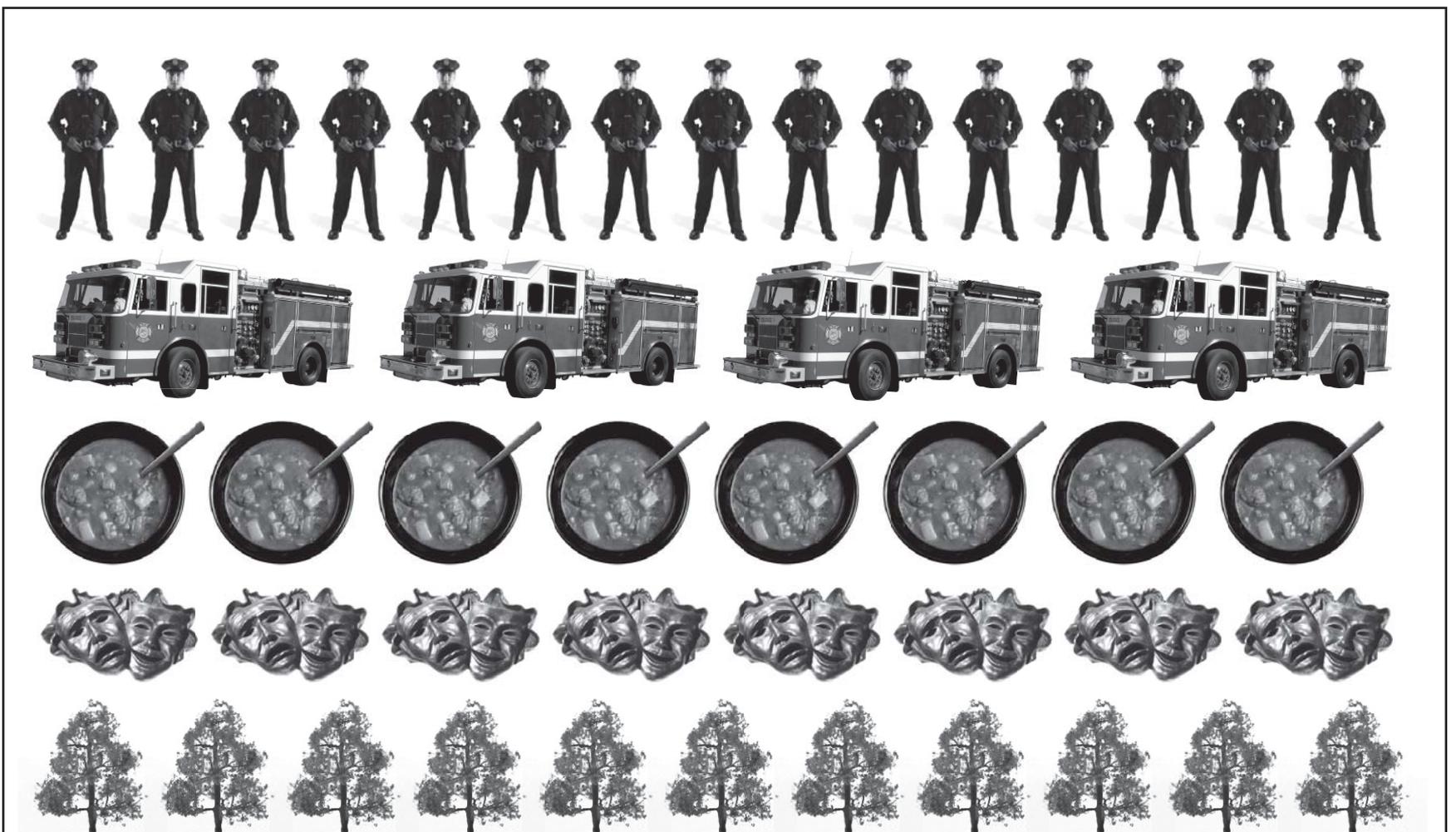
Even if you're homeless in San Francisco, you live like a king compared to them.

The tapestry exhibit has left the Tenderloin, but it tours. I can't think of a better exhibit for teenagers to see, an inspiration for students whose funding is about to be sold out by the banks and the political con artists.

To see more images of the collection, log onto faithfulfools.org/project_kopanang.htm. If you're interested in bringing the exhibition to your site, call the Faithful Fools at 474-0508 or email them at info@faithfulfools.org. ■



"Cosmic Self-Organizing Connectiveness" uses a jewel-laden spiderweb to illustrate its point in exhibit of South African tapestries.



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