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# Artists unlock 'Places of the Spirit'



'Japanese Teahouse at White Pine Camp,' 2002, is an example of Barry Lobdell's photography, which will be part of 'Places of the Spirit: Sacred Sites of the Adirondacks,' running Nov. 7 through Dec. 14 at the Four Arts.

Show aims to offer thought-provoking link between nature and spirituality when it opens Nov. 7 at the Four Arts.

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Special To The Daily News

From the majesty of a chapel reflected in a crystal lake to the quiet solitude of a confessional, four photographers capture images of places considered sacred in an upcoming exhibit at The Society of the Four Arts.

*Places of the Spirit: Sacred Sites of the Adirondacks*, which opens Nov. 7, combines the work of photographers Romaine Orthwein, Shelburne Thurber, Barry Lobdell and Heather MacLeod.

The artists were asked to search for structures and landscapes in the Adirondack region of New York that signify or once signified spiritual use and meaning.

"It's kind of amazing that in the eyes of these four very different artists what an entirely different approach came out," said Mara Miller, the show's curator.

Miller, an independent curator in New York, was

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## FOUR ARTS

*Photographs shot from personal viewpoints*

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recruited by the Lake Placid Institute for the Arts and Humanities, which commissioned the exhibition.

"When the idea was first raised, one has the tendency to think, 'Oh my God, 40 pictures of churches,'" Miller said.

Far from that, Orthwein learned quickly that churches are "loaded subject matter," she said. Shooting these photographs from a personal point of view without making them too personal was a challenge, Orthwein said.

"Ultimately, a church is such that one can attend a funeral, [and] it's also a place where people get married, a place that brings people together and a place that provokes controversy," Orthwein said.

The confessional booth was a subject that Orthwein, who inserts her own image in to all but one of her photographs, found particularly intriguing.

"I thought, 'The confessional booth — the room that keeps the secrets,'" Orthwein said. "I thought of all the different secrets that have been spilled in that room."

By inserting herself into her work, either by subtly staging herself in the shot or later adding an image digitally, Orthwein hoped to add something personal to the work.

Her image is frequently in motion in the pieces, or obscured by an object, so that the viewer is not quite sure at first glance if someone is there.

"I want the figure to be a metaphor for being between two different realms, like the physical and metaphysical, real and imaginary," Orthwein said.

The photographs of churches in the exhibit show some active, some abandoned, and still others that have taken on a new life. Active churches in the exhibit include St. Brendan's Catholic Church in Keene, taken by Lobdell, or Beth Joseph Synagogue in Tupper Lake, shot by Orthwein.

### **Evolution of churches**

Other images show how churches have evolved to take on a role such as an antique store or summer getaway for a group of friends.



Contemporary photographer Heather MacLeod often shows the stark contrast of the landscape against her images, as revealed in 'Log Cabin Church,' Mayfield, 2001, 30 by 30 inches. Her large-scale black-and-white works are part of an exhibit opening Nov. 7 at the Four Arts.

Orthwein raises an important consideration, Miller said.

"These structures and spaces that have been abandoned but were sacred places," said Miller. "If there are no people in a structure, it isn't going to last very long."

In contrast to Orthwein, Thurber chooses to show mostly empty interiors that suggest the presence of humans through discarded misal books and vacant pews.

Thurber's shot of Duane Methodist Church, for example, shows a classic Romanesque-style building alone on a hill, locked up and unused, but cared for by the community.

### **Stark contrast**

MacLeod works in large-scale black-and-white images, and often shows the stark contrast of the landscape against her images. In one example of a trailer-sized church, trees and telephone wires fill the background.

The photographers also searched out more personal sacred spaces such as private chapels in homes, and cemeteries.

Lobdell, a native of the region, uses his insider's knowledge and color images to capture the natural landscapes and private spots transformed

into sacred spaces.

The beauty of the spaces often took Orthwein by surprise, she said, singling out a private chapel owned by a family in Tapawingo.

The chapel, as well as the family's home, was made by hand without electronics or machinery, Orthwein said.

"It was such an extraordinary place," she said. "I had never seen anything like that."

The exhibit is a rare chance for Four Arts patrons to experience the "exciting medium" of contemporary photographers, said Nancy Mato-Sterling, the organization's executive vice president.

"It's such a wonderful idea in today's world that is becoming less spiritual and less in tune with nature," she said. "I think it will be a very handsome show — very interesting and very thought-provoking."

The show marks an early entrance into the Four Arts season and is an attempt to fill the space left by the National Painting Competition, which the Four Arts hosted until this year, Sterling said.

The show runs through Dec. 14 at The Society of the Four Arts. Call 655-7226 for information.