

# IT BEGAN BY SIMPLY REACHING OUT

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PARIS GIBSON SQUARE MUSEUM OF ART

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Acrylic human-shaped hearts, individually molded and embedded with a single flag for every nation, huddle close together inside handmade resin baskets. They rustle and move and cling together, little hands mixing and jumbling them up in search of the perfect heart in the interactive piece *Heartsong IV: One World, One Heart Many Heart Songs*, 2020. Each heart represents an unfamiliar nation to each little 7-year-old visitor whose eyes grow wide at the prospect of this “search and find” experience about distant lands and people. The wrapped cord that dangles from every heart is meant to be tied to each neighboring heart, located on a colorful abstract world map that covers the entirety of one of the gallery walls. This piece is part of Christina Rothe’s exhibition *Awakening and the One Heart Call Project*, an exhibition two years in the making, which focuses on people’s shared human existence.

Christina Rothe

Awakening and the OneHeart Call Project

\_building community with the voices of our hearts through the arts



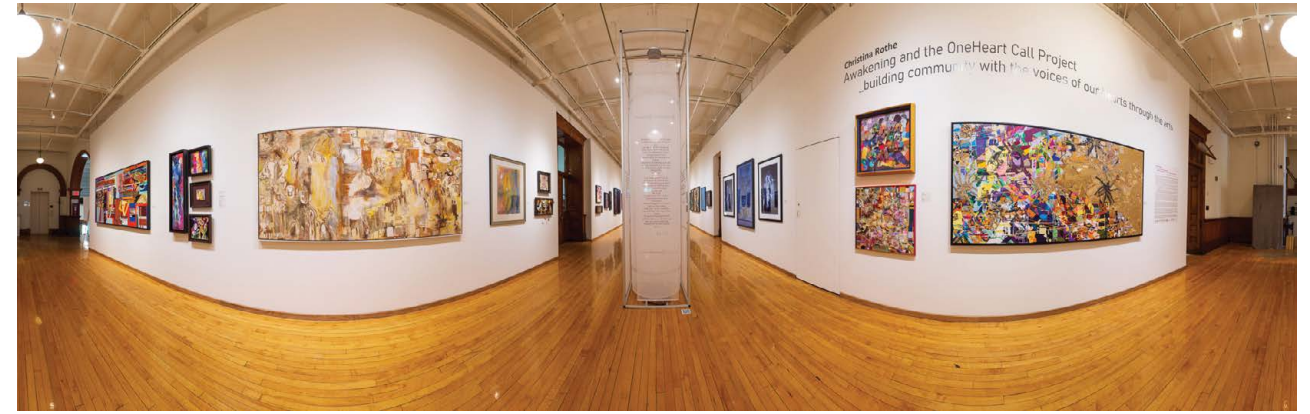
“Ever since I was a child, I found art to be my way of responding to the world. Through my art, I seek to express life’s journey in all its fullness. From the extremes of beauty, innocence, and courage to pain, depravity, and cruelty, these are experiences we all share in common as humanity.”

Christina Rothe is German-born and lives and works in Spokane, WA. Her most recognizable works are her intricate, fascinating, and almost trance-inducing multi-media thread paintings. Mesmerizing and conceptually provocative, with layered images and meanings that spring forth, her pieces appear to be the result of deep meditative concentration and hypnotic repetition. *The Spaces In-between*, 2020, a large-scale thread painting, depicts an abstracted non-specific space that takes the viewer on a visual journey through uncertain territory. Rich, textured cell-like forms mix and ripple with shapes that could be interpreted as colorful urban sprawl or cellular division filled with action, noise, and life. These contrasting textures and threads of color create juxtapositions that allow the viewer to interpret as they see fit. The meaning is ours, and we decide what is present or absent in the transformative spaces that fall in-between the lines.

“As I layer my individual threads of various weights and colors one thread at a time onto surfaces, I hold these extremes in context. My technique of working with threads evolved over many years, inspired by the African artist FAB (Adebisi Fabunmi). My hope is to communicate beauty in all of its phases, invoking the *OneHeartMind* within me and the viewer of my art in summoning courage to face all that life has to offer.”

Christina’s most recent body of work— *Christina Rothe: Awakening and the OneHeartCall Project\_ building community with the voices of our hearts through the arts*— exhibiting at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art (The Square) through February 12th, 2021, continues to explore her concerns about the human condition. However, this time there is a different component about fellowship and the bonds people share despite the differences that separate them, be it place, race, or religion. Christina gained strength to move her artistic message outwards, away from the internal intimacy of her own experience, towards the surrounding community. She began by “simply reaching out.”

The *OneHeartCall Project* is the cornerstone



of her newest work, with a mission to bring people together through the arts. The project highlights universally shared values of hope, love, and respect. Christina's intent is to create unity through art. She began by inviting diverse communities from Spokane, WA to partake in creative collaborations that included art-making, oral histories, choral performances, music, and dance. The work presented results from her commitment to working with everyday people representing socially and culturally diverse sectors, including students, musicians, artists, refugees, the elderly, or a combination of all the above. Eventually, the project grew into an artistic humanitarian experience as her path unfolded and connected with the lives of different people.

"The inspirational thread for this project is to remind us all that in spite of our beautiful differences— may it be language, culture, traditions, or skin color— we all have one thing in common, which is our beautiful heart! Growing up in Lagos, Nigeria, I came to learn that tensions amongst community members seemed to ease when we shared meals or played music or introduced other voices of the arts. Everyone involved realized then they had similar dreams

and fears despite their unique cultural differences. Nelson Mandela said, 'We are born innocent and learn to hate, if we learn how to hate we can learn how to love' and 'Courage is not the absence of fear but rather the triumph over it.'"

Reaching out to the community in Spokane did not come without its challenges; Christina felt as if skeptical eyes peered at her with concern when approached with her project. She began by working with students through The Community School (TCS) in Spokane. Instead of teacher-centered instruction, TCS learning is student-driven— students dive into authentic projects that integrate core subjects. It was a challenge to reach out and ask someone to speak in their native language and share their meaning of the word heart or let their heartbeat be recorded; it seemed invasive, even to Christina. However, it turned out breaking the communication barrier was not that difficult. Even for a stranger like herself, people opened up their lives to her; they wanted a chance to be heard, to tell their tales of sorrow and of grace. It became a deep and moving experience for everyone.

"Being an immigrant and naturalized citizen

myself who was told not too long ago to go back to the country I came from, I am moved to address the fact that in our nation we are still confronted with the ugly rearing of rising hate, suppression, and divisiveness. The idea of inclusion, a founding principle of our country, creates such overwhelming fear and anger towards others. This led to my community outreach to encourage more people to embrace our diversity so we can find heart to overcome fear, hate, racism, and divisiveness; only together are we able to face our challenges of the present and future."

There is the physical and emotional side to what heart means to each individual, and the metaphoric dark and bright side of our heart that can be at odds. The project gave the community a platform to explore these contrasting aspects in themselves and share their experiences at the pace they desired in the artistic expression of their choice. The student work created by *OneHeartCall Project* participants is exhibited in a uniquely designed installation,

bringing meaning to its special idea of kinship.

As a visitor, you enter an intimate and private space filled with words, colors, textures, and voices, with a subtle heartbeat in the background. A labyrinth in the shape of a heart veiled with translucent hanging panels to blur your vision suddenly reveals drawings, poems, and sculptures made by different students. People you do not yet know seem to reach out and establish a common connection. They sound as one in a singular space, with different parts coming together to function harmoniously, much like the ventricles and veins of a heart that pump blood through our bodies. You enter the installation through the oxygen-depleted part of the heart and exit, fulfilled, through the enriched side of the heart.

The *OneHeartCall Project* is far from complete because there is a "call and response" component asking for participation from people everywhere. Christina started the call in Spokane, and the

only together are we able to face our challenges of the present and future.



One World, One Heart, Many Heartsongs

message is spreading beyond the shelter of her home. Through the efforts of Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art (The Square), bonds are now forming with the Great Falls, MT community and she is tapping into people's hearts. To accompany the exhibition and join her project, the museum staff and docents worked with Christina to create educational programs and tours for the public-school at the museum system or applied in both the classroom and with remote learning. Due to the current pandemic, plans to create in-person communal activities have been converted to virtual happenings. Christina is currently working remotely with the Curative Art Collective at The Square, a program dedicated to enriching the lives of at-risk youth through the arts. The students interact with Christina virtually on a weekly basis to develop ideas, have a conversation, and grow through art-making. Together with The Square, she has expanded the project and connected with Conservatory ASL Northwest (CAN), whose purpose is to connect, cultivate, and empower deaf and hearing signers of all ages by facilitating both knowledge-sharing and social interactions in American Sign Language. Her collaboration with CAN Co-Founder Amanda Fudge has allowed her to reach artists in the deaf community across the United States.

There is hope that work submitted to Christina and created through her collaborations will be integrated into a future exhibition of the project. Christina's determination to continue to work on this project despite obstacles related to time, place, or current events shows the importance of the relationships we build and the common threads of life that we share with one another. The OneHeartCall is being heard by many, and the response is resonating within us all.

*Exhibitions presented by Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art are supported in part by the Montana Arts Council, a state agency funded by the State of Montana, Humanities Montana, National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the human endeavor, and National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funding is provided by museum members and the citizens of Cascade County, and generous support from Montana Credit Union and D.A. Davidson. Special sponsorship by Montana Woman Magazine.*

To join the OneHeartCall Project, go to [www.oneheartcallproject.com](http://www.oneheartcallproject.com)

OCTOBER 2, 2020 THROUGH FEBRUARY 12, 2021



CHRISTINA ROTHE, 2020. THE SPACES INBETWEEN. 4' x 8'

## CHRISTINA ROTHE

*Awakening and the OneHeartCall Project\_building community with the voices of our hearts through the arts*

The Square invites you to participate in an exhibition of work by Christina Rothe. OneHeartCall Project highlights universally shared values of hope, love, and respect. Rothe's intent is to create unity through art. To accomplish this, she invited socially and culturally diverse communities from Spokane, WA to partake in creative collaborations that included art making, oral histories, choral performances, music, and dance. The work comes from her vested interest in the betterment of human relationships and the positive results of creating bonds through art despite individual differences.

Christina Rothe was raised in Lagos, Nigeria and born in Germany. She lives and works in Washington and is a multi-media artist. She is primarily known for her dramatic large-scale thread paintings, where she layers individual threads of various weights and colors one thread at a time onto a surface. In this exhibition, Rothe combines technology with tradition to complete her project vision where layers of sound, community art works, video, and audio recordings are woven into a creative visual display.



CHRISTINA ROTHE, 2020. SHADOW HEART. 53" x 26"

**The Square**  
**Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art**  
 1400 First Avenue North  
 Great Falls, MT 59401  
 406-727-8255 / [the-square.org](http://the-square.org)

**Virtual Online Reception:** Friday, October 2, 2020 at 5:30 pm, Facebook Live @ [facebook.com/PGSMOA](https://www.facebook.com/PGSMOA)

**Artist Workshop:** Saturday, October 3, 2020 from 10:00am to 3:00pm, Call to Enroll



montana woman

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