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MoNA climate change exhibit evolving this year

By KIMBERLY CAUVEL @Kimberly_SVH Jul 15, 2017

LA CONNER — In an effort to improve and expand its climate change exhibit for 2018, the Museum of Northwest Art will not host a show this fall.

The exhibit, called Surge, is a collaboration between the museum and Skagit Climate Science Consortium. It's intended to spur discussions about the impacts of climate change on coastal communities.

Artists partner with researchers from the consortium and use the researchers' data to share artistic perspectives on impacts such as coastal storm surge, sea level rise and flooding.

The consortium is a group of scientists researching the effects of climate change in the Skagit River watershed, from the mountains to the sea.

The museum and consortium started Surge with a weekend exhibit in September 2015. It was expanded to one week in September 2016.

Before the next exhibit, artists and scientists will have nearly a year to collaborate.

Five of about a dozen consortium scientists described their research Thursday for artists interested in collaborating.

National Park Service geologist Jon Riedel showed aerial photos of Banded Glacier in the North Cascades in 1960 and 2016 — the latter including a newly formed lake of glacial melt.

“I just feel we can have such a role as scientists and artists in presenting the emotional impact of the data,” Conway glass artist Lin McJunkin said.

McJunkin has collaborated with Riedel and Western Washington University ecosystems ecologist Roger Fuller on pieces for the first two Surge exhibits. She plans to develop a third piece to be considered for the next exhibit.

The exhibit will open in October 2018 as a three-month display throughout the entire museum and will include a variety of community events, MoNA communications director Justine Thayer said.

“It’s going to be a much larger scale in term of the amount of artwork and the amount of time spent on it,” she said.

Thayer said after the first two exhibits, the museum decided it wanted to allow more time for research and preparation before the next exhibit.

“We weren’t getting into the caliber of art that we wanted to display or the kind of back research we really wanted to see happen for this kind of project,” she said of the early exhibits.

Spending more than a year developing the exhibit will allow for more community involvement and educational events.

It will also allow the museum to spend more time reviewing art for approval to ensure each piece accurately represents the research, Thayer said.

Consortium administrator Carol Macilroy said having more time to develop the 2018 exhibit will allow the artists to explore the science, including possibly seeing how the research is done, before developing their piece.

“We’re super excited about it in that there is a real commitment from the museum in terms of staff time and curation and support to the artists to really fully partner with (consortium) scientists and to produce new works of art that are really based on scientific information,” she said.

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