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SAMA-LORETTO TO HOST DUAL SOLO EXHIBITIONS IN MAIN GALLERY

Loretto – Patrons of the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art at Loretto will have twice the treat when visiting the Museum this fall. Opening October 23 in the main gallery will be two exhibitions – *Cynthia Nixon: Lighthouse* and *Will Espey: Sovereign*. While SAMA regularly mounted dual exhibitions in its earlier years, it is a concept that hasn't been explored in more than 15 years.

“The double-exhibition in Loretto’s main gallery is something new, at least in my years at SAMA,” said Dr. Scott Dimond, Curator for Visual Arts. “If it goes well, I’ll definitely be thinking of doing more double shows in the future.”

In fact, the last time SAMA hosted dual exhibitions was last century. To reinforce the impression that these are separate shows, Dimond will rearrange the moveable walls, or modules, to suggest two mini-galleries.

“I am looking forward to seeing these two exhibitions side-by-side in the same gallery,” he said. “The similarities and differences between these two artists should provide a lot of food for thought, as well as a feast for the eyes.”

The two exhibitions will remain on view through January 23, 2016.

State College artist Cynthia Nixon will be featured in *Cynthia Nixon: Lighthouse*. From her beginnings in the 1970s as a feminist pioneer, Nixon has gone on to explore issues of family and environment through the lens of art history and creative reinterpretation. *Lighthouse* comprises 19 paintings, drawings and mixed-media works created over the last decade. Inspired by sources as varied as Byzantium, the Northern Renaissance and American folk art, Nixon has created a unique body of work that presents personal experience as iconic. Combining ancient approaches to art with space-age materials and modern subjectivity, Nixon’s compositions are curiously arresting. They radiate a sense of authority and preciousness which the artist has taken out of the cathedral and resituated in her own contemporary world. In a time when tradition and faith have been called into question, Nixon’s art points back to the unchanging sacredness of place and family.

Nixon was raised in Upstate New York and Maine, though currently calls State College home. Pursuing her lifelong passion for art through studies at Dickinson College, Penn State University and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Nixon has exhibited her work throughout the United States. Today she is represented in many public collections, among which are the Smithsonian Institution American Art Museum and the Museum of Art and Design in New York City.

Also on view will be *Will Espey: Sovereign*. In his art, Espey explores issues of heritage, identity and shared human experience. *Sovereign* features 30 of the artist's unique painted and mixed-media compositions. Set in elaborate frames made of birch bark, porcupine quills and other traditional materials, some of Espey's paintings depict heroes of Native American history such as He-Who-Combs, better known as Hiawatha. Others recount themes from legend, including the coming of Sky Woman and the creation of Turtle Island, or America. Still others are visual teachings on the cultivation of personal virtues. Suggestive of dreamlike inner visions, Espey's rainbow colors and scintillating textures leave the viewer feeling inexplicably uplifted. Both mystical and joyous, *Will Espey: Sovereign* affords viewers an experience not to be missed.

A member of the Mohawk Nation who grew up in Johnstown yet currently resides in Ebensburg, Espey is fascinated by Native American history and spirituality. He identifies deeply with the challenges facing America's First Peoples and has worked within native communities not only as an artist, but as an advocate and healer. At the same time, however, Espey fosters reconciliation between Indian and non-Indian worlds. The artistic traditions of each come together in his lyrical paintings, and while many of his subjects are drawn from native lore, nearly all celebrate the universal values of peace, freedom and spiritual wholeness.

The Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art at Loretto is located on the campus of Saint Francis University. Hours of operation are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday. The Museum is open to the public free of charge. For more information, please call (814) 472-3920 or visit www.sama-art.org.