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Local News: Sunday, December 28, 1997

Art Made By Many Hands Helps Celebrate Kwanzaa -- Quilt Serves As A Testament To Self-Determination

Linda Keene
Seattle Times Staff Reporter

Naivasha Sophusson-Smith poured all four years of her artistic self into a Kwanzaa project yesterday, intently coloring bright pastels on cloth until her small hands finished.

Beaming, she proudly showed her work, a perfect testament to the second principle of Kwanzaa being celebrated yesterday - self-determination.

Kwanzaa, which runs between Dec. 26 and Jan. 1, emphasizes a different value each day as part of the nonreligious holiday that celebrates African-American heritage and culture.

Yesterday's tribute to self-determination was held at the Seattle Art **Museum**. While thousands of people toured the museum's Leonardo da Vinci exhibit, the Kwanzaa celebration was quietly under way on the third floor.

Two sisters, textile artists Linda and Shirley Gibson, created a textile installation for the wall and encouraged visitors to add to it. They worked at a table in the middle of the room, which was covered with pieces of cloth, thread, beads and pastel crayons.

The creations were added to the wall art, which was called the "I Can Community Quilt."

"Kujichagulia" is the second day of Kwanzaa and means self-determination, or "I can," said Linda Gibson. "The quilt will have a flow of energy" from all the contributors, she said.

Dozens of people participated in the project, pinning cloth designs under pictures of well-known African Americans, including author James Baldwin, singer Ella Fitzgerald and politician Barbara

Jordan.

The project was co-sponsored by the Seattle Art **Museum** and the planned African American Heritage **Museum** and Cultural Center. The center is being developed at the former **Colman School** at 1515 24th Ave. S., directly south of the Interstate 90 lid.

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"This gives us a chance to initiate programs without the facility," said Bob Flowers, chairman of the board for the heritage **museum**, which plans to open in 2000.

Kwanzaa will be celebrated at the center when it opens. In the meantime, the interactive textile project was meant to emphasize the importance of exchanging handmade gifts at Christmastime, as an alternative to commercialism.

By all accounts, it was a hit.

"Naivasha had a great time," said the girl's father, Melvin Smith. "I wanted to make sure she was aware of Kwanzaa and exposed to it."

Linda Keene's phone message number is 206-464-2210. Her e-mail address is: lkee-new@seattimes.com

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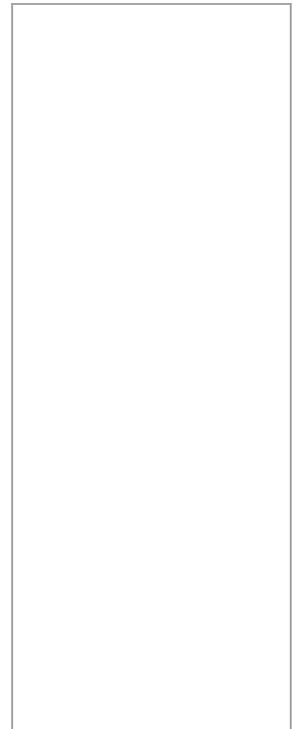
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