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Exhibit shows items left behind

PHOTOS SAVE MEMORIES

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CARY - A dozen or so fragments of lives hang in a bright gallery at the Cary Arts Center. Bound by frames are large photographs of a rumpled Boy Scouts uniform, a translucent glass shoe, a set of forks, a burned bronze cast of a baby's shoes - each a link to an anonymous, departed soul.

"Saved," one of the center's first exhibitions, makes art of the often mundane possessions left by the dead to their friends and family.

"It seems to somehow encapsulate the person," said Lorene Delany-Ullman, the California-based author of the prose poems that accompany the huge, detailed prints by Jody Servon, a North Carolina photographer.

The exhibition has been shown at almost a dozen venues in three years, from museums to medical centers.

Servon, an associate professor at Appalachian State University, found the project's roots in the passing of her father and three friends.

"The conversations about death were so prevalent in my life that I was trying to think about ways to celebrate people's lives in a creative way," she said. In talk after talk, people showed her the simple physical reminders they'd saved after wakes and funerals.

So she put those left-behind possessions between a bright white background and a medium-format camera. She searched for the imprint of the dead, the reason people bothered to save this stuff.

"Where is there a scratch?" asked Servon, 39. "Where is there a something that shows these objects were worn or cared for?"



This Boy Scout shirt, passed down from father to daughter, is part of the "Saved" exhibition at the Cary Arts Center.

Servon met Delany-Ullman at an artists' retreat a year after the first exhibition of the images. Delany-Ullman surprised herself when she proposed a new dimension for the project: She would write poetic biographies to accompany the photos.

Taken together, their works become colorful but unadorned obituaries. The prose, distilled from interviews with the objects' owners, jumps from the clothing and trinkets into peoples' lives.

Two gleaming forks pictured in the exhibition, the caption reveals, are American military-issued utensils, used by an imprisoned Nazi officer and passed along through generations. On another wall, a Boy Scout shirt is a fading reminder of Dad.

"I think every object carries some sort of story," Delany-Ullman said.

"They're so common that people don't think of them as being artful, either," Servon added.

They believe the simplicity of the objects, the fact that they aren't opulent or rare, makes them accessible. The project's simplicity in general makes death an easier topic of conversation, Servon said. The objects are reminders of lives past, they said, and reminders that lives end.

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