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**Iguana and Goddess
Embrace Freedom**

By Joyce Lynn

An iguana wraps itself around the upright form of a woman. Multi-textured, its long tail hooks upward. From the left side of this embrace a rose holds a fly within its closed petals and from the right tumbles a huge chain. Spatially the pairing gives balance, but emotionally the message is startling: the iguana has broken the thick chain.

The goddess has transformed from helpless victim to free persona.

“Themes of confinement -- of breaking out of confinement -- is what my work is all about,” explains artist Nancy Sykes-Cockerham, whose recent lithographs and paintings use Mexican and Mayan mythical motifs to order her own universe.

“Night of the Iguana,” an exhibit of more than a dozen of Sykes-Cockerham's works, will open Friday, August 8, with a reception from 6 to 8 p.m at La Lola's Restaurant. The show runs through August 31.

Dennis Pohl, chair of the fine Arts Department at

Instituto Allende where Sykes-Cockerham has studied, calls her use of space “a disturbing disintegration of the conventional world,” which, he says, “works to amplify the emotions she brings to her subject, the primordial underpinning of human beings.”

The unfettered spirit Sykes-Cockerham portrays reflects the freedom of artistic exploration the Florida resident found when she came to SMA last March:

“It all started with a dream,” Sykes-Cockerham recalls. In January 1996 she dreamt she was enfolded within huge wings. “Something took me and held me very tightly; I woke up with a feeling of being comforted,” she says. For Sykes-Cockerham the dream directed her to come to SMA.

She followed the dream's guidance and her work has moved away from canvases filled with geometric shapes with no human life to pictorial images of the female form laden with eggs, the color red, birds -- symbols that suggest rebirth, renewal, and regeneration.

The exhibit dramatically shows this progression. In an early lithograph the female form resembles an Aztec sacrifice -- the body arched, chest out, head back, severed arms -- a helpless victim unable to create. In another, inside a womb-shaped form, a woman struggles. In still another she is chained to the iguana. Eventually the chain is smaller, then broken.

Sykes-Cockerham explores the iguana in relation to the universe-with the living body of the goddess:

mother, creator, divinity -- as the universe. In Mayan cosmology, the Earth is perched on the back of the iguana. Sykes-Cockerham created the work without consciously knowing the mythology this reflects.

To create her lithographs Sykes-Cockerham again calls on dreams. "The lithographs are well-planned," she says. "The images come to me in dreams. I see them in dreams. Most of my paintings are my immediate reaction to whatever I'm painting at the moment. It's emotional, fast, unplanned. I react to the subject. I don't believe in copying someone else's images. That only makes you a good draftsman. Art comes from the heart, from within."

Sykes-Cockerham, who has been exhibiting since 1971, has been represented in many major shows, including a solo exhibit at Boca Museum of Art, Boca Raton, Florida, and recently at Spirit Square Center for the Arts, Charlotte, North Carolina. Her work has appeared in prestigious competitions such as the annual Hortt competition, Fort Lauderdale Museum of Art, Palm Beach Society of Four Arts Exhibition; and the Lockhaven Museum of Art Annual Competition, Orlando, Florida. She has a Bachelor's degree from Murray State University, and a master's degree in art from the University of South Florida, Tampa.

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