

North Dakota Museum of Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

North Dakota Museum of Art announces New gift by South African artist, Georgie Papageorge

Suspension, an altarpiece created for the 1990 Native American Thanksgiving service at New York's Cathedral of St. John the Devine, is a recent gift to the North Dakota Museum of Art from Georgie Papageorge, a South African artist. Through the Museum, a group of students from the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa collaborated with the artist on the piece. It is on exhibit through December 3, 2006, accompanied by related works. The Museum is open 9 - 5 week days, 11 - 5 weekends. For More information call (701) 777-4195.

Georgie Papageorge grew from the soul of South Africa. Born there, raised there, rooted there, she consciously chose to stay—through the rich years of plenty for white South Africans, through the terror and fear that escorted out years of apartheid and swept the country into endless change.

She makes art from the violence, the warring, the death, and then the atonement. Revolution, colonialism, the Catholic Church, the nightly news on television, the Ndebele, the landscape of the great Kalahari Desert, her own family compound: from such as these she draws both her themes and her symbols. Her themes are huge; her reach is gigantic; the resulting work is monumental. Her sculpture, *Suspension*, held its own when photographed from a helicopter on an African gold mine dump. That same work was moved to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City to serve as a contemporary altarpiece. Against the architecture of a gigantic Gothic cathedral, it still held its own.

Papageorge defines the content of her art through symbols. At a young age she had been taught by the Catholic Church to think symbolically. She began to collect the symbols of her pain: thorns from the Acacia trees, security fences, gates, and luscious reds and golds representing the rich contrast with the impoverished. She first saw chevron tape crisscrossed over a field to keep birds from devouring the crop. She knew its context, that it was used as a barrier in front of manholes or dangerous places, or to cordon off areas during riots in South Africa. It seemed to represent the things that were happening around her in an abstract and succinct way.

The Chi-Rho is one of Papageorge's most important symbols. *Chi-Rho* is Greek (the X is *Chi* and P is *Rho*) but since early times has been the monogram of Christ. In early Christianity it was as much a symbol of the Resurrection as of the Crucifixion. Ultimately Papageorge found she could use the symbol as a positive and joyful image or as an image of sacrifice and war.

Papageorge's artwork is highly personal embodying her fears, insecurities, and passions. While focused on her private struggle she felt the parallels of the much larger struggle going on in South Africa. Papageorge felt she became a political artist the day her 13-year-old nephew disappeared on a mine dump and was never found. Her nephew had planned to play on the gold dumps where he was trying to trap guinea fowl. A black friend was to meet him. Whether he met his friend, or even who the friend was, has never been established. As Papageorge's art never loses its roots in the personal, because it is so deeply felt and passionately lived, it never becomes merely fashionable political art.

Georgie Papageorge created an important record of a historic moment when a democracy was born out of itself. Internally, through great years of turmoil and pain, came a new South Africa. Papageorge created herself as an artist through parallel turmoil and pain.