

THE BURDEN BOAT PROJECT

Kurt Steger

The Burden Boat Project first came into being as an invitation to a solo exhibition on the campus of Virginia Tech University where the opening reception and its maiden voyage fell on Sept 11 2009. While the school population was still in mourning over the worst campus shooting in US history, I felt a compulsion to create an art piece that might help facilitate healing. The burden boat project was born, a twelve-foot vessel made of ceramic and wood with cotton bags filled with hallowed ground from the Virginia Tech campus. What truly makes the piece come alive is the interaction of those who participate.

The concept behind the sculpture is to create a container where people can intentionally release their personal burdens. During the duration of the show, people are invited to write their burdens on scraps of paper or send them in by mail or email and place the written burdens into the boat. The act of doing this in partnership with others tends to show that we all carry burdens and with this collective support we can let them go individually and collectively.

BURDEN BOAT Washington DC

On September 11th, the Washington DC Burden Boat will be carried from the Pepco Edison Place Gallery from the "Ten Years After 911" exhibition to the Kogod Courtyard, shared by the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the National Portrait Gallery. Messages will be added into the boat throughout the day and at the appointed time a ritual of release will be performed. The new burden bags will contain some ground collected from NY. The ceremony is a sacred act and allows a sense of release for attendees. As the artist, I honor all those that have made the courageous choice to let go of something they may have held for moments, years or a lifetime. Together in ceremony we will let go of our collective burdens and this has the power to bring us together in fellowship.

This is an uplifting event and it is a time for reflection and celebration, of moving forward in our lives and becoming wiser from our experiences. The ceremony and Burden Boat brings people together; it creates common bonds on a deep level and fosters compassion, empathy and trust.

The Burden Boat Project is in an ongoing interactive work of art, there is no dogma nor pretence, no religious undertones - it is a piece of art that is infused with the spirit of those people who choose to interact both privately and in community in whatever way they feel it suitable for them.