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HOLLYWOOD

Artists focusing on large global issues

South Florida artists are uniting to raise consciousness for social problems worldwide.

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BY EILEEN SOLER
Special to The Miami Herald

A local artists collective is working to educate and make people aware of global issues.

"Philosophically, it's our response to bring about change," said Gustavo Ortiz, co-founder of Conscious Artist Collective and house manager for Hollywood Central Performing Arts Center.

On Thursday at the center, the group will host an evening of music, improvisational theater, fine art and poetry at the third installment of The Groove Series. The artists will turn the spotlight on the atrocities in the Darfur region of western Sudan.

Ortiz, who produces the show with co-founder and center co-worker Anna Teixeira, hopes the series is the first of many to emphasize the global concerns of local artists.

"It gives art more substance than doing art just for art's sake. It's an out-of-the-box idea to bring us from where we are to where we all say we want to be," Ortiz said.

Teixeira said future series topics could be race relations, women's issues or environmental concerns.

At a recent event on July 19, 18 artists showcased talent at the theater's Spotlight Corner Cafe. Comfortable sofas, overstuffed chairs and walls lined floor to ceiling with art by Kapone of West Africa created a bohemian setting.

Guests later viewed a film in the theater's auditorium that brought to light the devastating facts of the matter. In four years since the Darfur conflict began in February 2003 between the region's military, rebel factions and tribal armies, more than 400,000 civilians are dead and 2.5 million civilians forced from their homes are living in refugee camps.

Proceeds of the events are filtered to the Save Darfur Coalition through No More Tears, a nonprofit organization founded by actress, model and journalist Somy Ali of Plantation.

Ali, a former Bollywood actress who was born Muslim in Pakistan to Pakistani and Iraqi parents, started the charity to build shelters and schools for abused women and children.

Money is raised primarily by selling T-shirts embellished with slogans and art from Ali's So-Me Designs company that promote religious tolerance and world peace.

A new Save Darfur T-shirt was recently added to the product line.

"It doesn't matter what nationality or religion we are, we all want to help victims in Darfur," Ali said.

Teixeira said the show will be hosted by the THEY Improve acting troupe and feature Kapone, music by Victory Sound, DJ Bles Won, WorkEthic and Non Grata, plus poetry by Wilkine Brutus.

Conscious Artist Collective -- The Groove Series begins at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Hollywood Central Performing Arts Center, 1770 Monroe St. (at U.S. 1). Tickets cost \$12. For tickets, call 866-811-411, For general information, call 305-766-2757.

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