January 5 – February 22, 2009

Thursday, January 29

3 p.m. Lecture by Anna Von Mertens
Donohue Rare Book Room
3rd Floor, Gleeson Library | Geschke Center

Followed by a reception in the gallery

In "As the Stars Go By" Anna Von Mertens depicts the precise star rotations over some of the most violent events in the history of the United States. Through these contemplative black and white panels, the artist creates memorials for these tragic events. Each piece places the viewer in that moment, reminding us that we are all part of history and the cosmos. The works encourage us to not only remember the damage done through violence, but also to contemplate the beauty that this violence disrupts.

Since the early 1970's feminist artists have used "the stitch" to reclaim what has long been considered women's work; in "As the Stars Go By" Anna Von Mertens takes on American history, establishing herself as social critic as well as creator. Her work asks all of us to delve deeper into our place in history, reminding us of the dangers of a world structured by dominance over others. Anna Von Mertens is an established fiber artist whose hand-stitched works have shown throughout the country. "As the Stars Go By" was completed in 2006. This exhibition includes five of the nine pieces in the series.

We are grateful to the Jack Hanley Gallery in San Francisco, the Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland and the Ambach and Rice Gallery in Seattle as well as the collectors Alden and Dan Miller and Driek and Michael Zirinsky for their generous loans of the works.

In addition to "As the Stars Go By," we will be displaying related books from the Donohue Rare Book Room's collection selected by John Hawk, Rare Book Librarian.

Artist Statement

I use the stitch as a marker of time, to consider our oblique relationship to the past, present, and future, and ways for forging a relationship with this shifting terrain. I use the stitch as an orientation marker, a way of citing where one has been and where one is going.

"As the Stars Go By" looks at pivot points in American history, moments where the intensity of what takes place separates what came before from what follows. Using a computer program that calculates the actual stars seen at any chosen moment allows a kind of time traveling that places the viewer at a specific vantage point. My hand-stitched works have the proportions of a movie screen, calling into question our relationship with American history, whether we are passive observers or active participants in these events.

Events portrayed in the series include the Civil War Battle of Antietam, which remains the greatest one-day loss of life in America's history; the stars seen from the balcony of Memphis's Lorraine Motel on April 4, 1968 as dusk settles during the hour between the time that Martin Luther King, Jr., was shot and the time he was pronounced dead; and sunrise from the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad on March 20, 2003, as bombing announced the second war between Iraq and the United States.

The work is intended to act on many levels: as a memorial, as an actual vantage from a specific moment in history, but ultimately I am simply documenting an impassive natural cycle that is oblivious to the violence below.

—Anna Von Mertens, 2008