

MFA show makes impressive statement

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A visitor to the studio of the mature Henri Matisse, interested in acquiring an inexpensive work, spotted a relatively simple but beautiful line drawing by the renowned artist, lying haphazardly unfurled on a worktable. Thinking he might be able to obtain it quite affordably, the visitor suggested that the piece seemed to have required a minimum of effort, asking, "How long did it take you to do?"

Suspecting the ploy, Matisse responded philosophically, "My whole life."

Graduate students are in the upper echelon of experience among student artists. About to earn their Master of Fine Arts degrees, those exhibiting in the "MFA Thesis Exhibition 2004" at the UMD University Art Gallery are not, for the most part, fully seasoned.

But their proven commitment to art as a field of endeavor, and the intensity of their recently completed graduate education, means that their artistic voices are focused and defensible, and that their work reflects an accountable, and often surprising, level of professionalism. Such is definitely the case at the University Art Gallery exhibit at the College of Visual and Performing Arts at The Star Store in downtown New Bedford.

Adding immeasurably to the

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professional look of the exhibit is its expertly sensitive installation by University Art Gallery Director Lasse B. Antonsen. The intellectual, emotional, and spiritual depths within the interacting conversations elicited from his juxtapositioning of these varied bodies of artwork reveal Mr. Antonsen's mastery and the considerable value he brings to the institution.

The 22 graduate degree candidates showing in the exhibit represent both the UMD Fine Arts Department and the Program in Artisanry, but in looking at this work, a visitor might not be able to accurately pinpoint the particular discipline of each. Increasingly, international contemporary art crosses borders and defies definitions to bend and meld genres and techniques into more expressively malleable means. This interdisciplinarity is helpful, and in fact now nearly imperative, to meet the demands of addressing and interpreting the complexities of contemporary life.

While the 2004 edition of this annual exhibit is possessed of an uncommonly high degree of quality across the board, an in-depth discussion must necessarily be limited in a newspaper review.

However, some artistic voices

or individual works demand notice, so therefore, with admitted subjectivity, here are some observations and comments.

Entering the main foyer at the Star Store, the visitor first confronts the mixed media paintings on paper of Sandra Blödeau - rooftop views of ventilator structures visible from upper floor studios in The Star Store building. Ms. Blödeau treats her New Bedford subject matter with the heartfelt respect of an adoring fan, isolating monumental and modernist contours with the precision of a Sheeler or a Demuth, but imbuing her subjects with more warmly individuated personalities. A series of eight related pastel and/or charcoal studies that evoke Edward Hopper's bleakness are installed down the hallway.

In three pieces offered in the Crapo Gallery, and a cage-game installation in an upstairs space, sculptor Eric Durant offers his explorations and interpretations of the commodification and commercialization of male violence in our culture, as represented by his toys, games, and figures that refer to rubberized plastic soldiers and arcade-type games.

Elsewhere in the Crapo Gallery, six works of carved and painted wood by Elizabeth Cecil Spotswood Alexander III are beguiling.

Evoking the sophistication, wit, and creative artistry of Venezuelan sculptor Marisol, Ms.

Alexander adds spirituality, outrageous whimsy, and the practical element of utility. She demonstrates a remarkable mastery of techniques and applications.

Alexander M. Harrington's "Five Photographs of Numbers" and "Page Number Thirteen" engage the mind in Johnsian and Duchampian questions of the meaning of representation.

Chad Frownfelter's seven ceramic pieces combine the visual spirit of R. Crumb's "Keep on Truckin'" ethos with skateboarding's daring and athleticism. Exquisitely crafted, his talents are revealed at their zenith in such complex pieces as "The Ride," "Tricks on a Rail," and "Celebration."

So strong is his control of visual narrative that it registers in the brain only as a mind-blowing after-thought that his main characters are also teapots.

Within the University Art Gallery's main space, one first encounters Petra Kralickova's impressive figurative ceramic sculpture.

Mostly neutered of gender, these headless — and some armless — bodies are lyrically configured into pure organic forms that exude emotional states of mind. Her wall piece, "Locust," is perhaps one of the finest of her oeuvre as pure sculpture, but each of her six works is beautifully rendered and hauntingly personal. Set upon smoothed concrete-surfaced pedestals, they exude a subtle textural interplay of sensuous physicalities.

Shara Porter's three pieces are as intriguing visually as they are intellectually.

"Rust" is a rust-making machine-as-painting. "Continuum" sheds interesting light (no pun intended) on thin backlit pieces of porcelain, and "Fosund," a work of exception subtlety, greets visi-

tors on either side of the Art Gallery entrance.

Metals Department graduate Brian Ferrell has crafted desirable pieces of hollow ware and furniture that give utilitarian practicality to sleek 1950s-esque design.

Installed in Gallery 244, Diana Acevedo-Carns is exhibiting mostly documentary photographs of an installation called "Cisener Chambers."

Using a variety of photo-print techniques, her images effectively meld ancient signifiers of exotic Istanbul, Turkey, with up-to-the-minute technology. Jee-Young Maeng's "Infinite Incongruity" illustrates how high-tech image-making can depend on old-fashioned methodologies. Jingmei Wu's narrative sequence "The Secret Path: Journeys of Two Generations" is a revelation of the personal transcribed in multi-media electronic imaging.

In the rear gallery, standout attractions include Laura E. Sapely's fiber art, Jennifer Mayoct's oversized woodcut prints, Daniel Becker's ancient relic paintings, Jennifer M. Nardone's fiber weavings, and imaginatively transportive wall pieces by Alison Bruan.

Other degree candidates in the exhibit include fiber artist Myung-Soon Kim, printmaker and painter Lind Binder, painters Laura Mack, Diane Arvanites-Leclair, and Omari Ra, and ceramicist Sidonie Villere.

Always an opportunity for aesthetic discovery and adventure, the "MFA Thesis Exhibition 2004" continues at the University Art Gallery in the Star Store, 715 Purchase St. in downtown New Bedford, through May 13. Gallery hours are daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free. For further information, call (508) 999-8555.