

Some of the works of the Annual Inmate Fine Arts Festival in Huntsville were on display in the Memorial Student Center

Saturday. Inmates exhibited their collections of oils, charcoals and acrylics.



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Huntsville's TDC inmates 'show off' artwork in MSC

By PAUL BARTON

Most prison systems aren't thought of as training grounds in the fine arts, but the Texas Department of Corrections (TDC), could change that idea before long.

A sampling of its fine arts program went on display in the Memorial Student Center Gallery Saturday in the form of 25 paintings and drawings. The collection consists of oils, charcoals and acrylics, and all the work was done by inmates in the TDC.

The exhibit itself is a project of the Crafts and Arts Committee of Texas A&M and will run through Feb. 4. Chip DeMois, committee chairman, says this is the first exhibit of prison art at A&M, but he hopes it will become an annual event.

"We were looking for something that had both quality and uniqueness," says DeMois of the exhibit. "I think people will be surprised at the quality of the work."

Although the paintings were produced inside the confines of different prison units, their variety shows no bounds. Included in the display are nature scenes, faceless portraits, animal pictures and a 3-by-4 foot painting of country and western stars Waylon Jennings and Jessie Couler.

Works on display at the MSC this month will be part of the Annual Inmate Fine Arts Festival in Huntsville May 6. Paintings and

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drawings, however, will make up just one part of the festival. There will also be sculpture and wood cuts, leathercrafts, and handicrafts, and a modern dance team from the Gorie Women's Unit, also in

Huntsville. Music will include rock, country-western and Mexican style.

According to Jim Humphries, art instructor for the Windham School District in Huntsville this is "probably the top inmate art program in the nation. No other institution has as an extensive or ongoing program

"To some it's a form of expression and to some it's partially for financial reasons."

as this one." The Windham School District serves all units in the TDC. The most popular fine arts programs among inmates is painting and drawing, says Humphries.

"It's a hobby to a lot of them," says Dr. Robert Pierce, learning coordinator of Windham, "to some it's a form of expression and to some it's partly for financial reasons — just like it is on the outside."

Inmates paint both in art classes and in their spare time. Most spend

an average of six hours a week on the activity, but they can spend as much as 30 hours a week on painting.

Humphries says inmates paint some scenes that deal with prison life, but most of the their work has to do with "things involved with the concept of being free." Popular subjects include wildlife, hunting and fishing, family photographs and religion. "There is quite a bit of religious work," he says, "both Catholic and Protestant themes."

Paintings like the ones on display at the MSC cost between \$10 and \$300, and Humphries says some inmates make as much as \$1,000 a year off their work.

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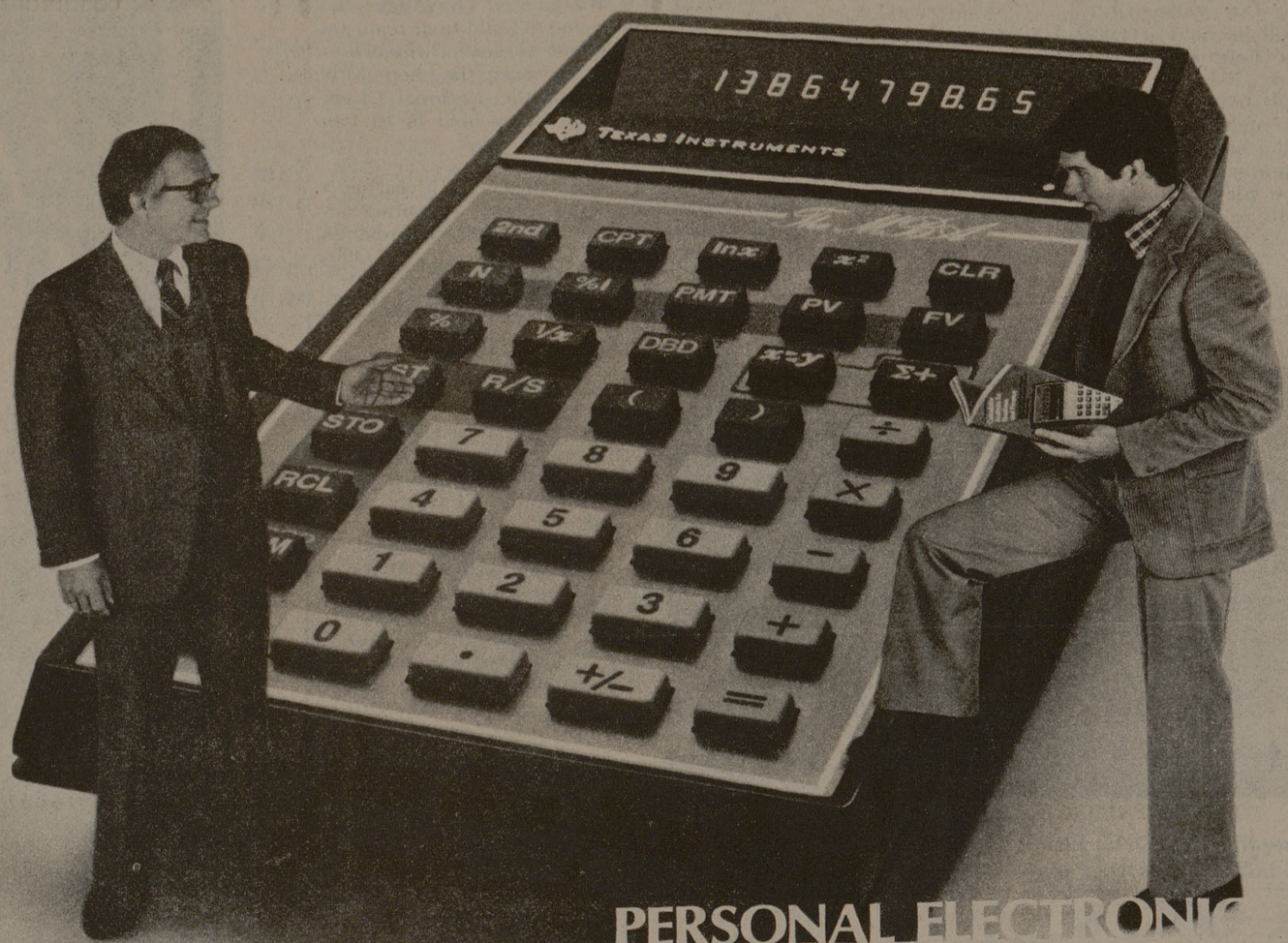
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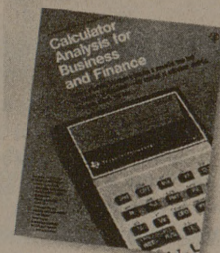
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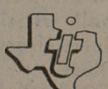
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