

Painting beyond the numbers

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NEW YORK — For would-be artists who found the paint-by-number method a less than satisfactory introduction to painting, there is now a better way of developing latent artistic skills at home.

It's called Createable Painting and is the brainchild of a research team at Binney & Smith, an Easton, Pa., firm that manufactures educational and artist materials. Four years in the planning, the new method is being marketed in the form of craft kits in art stores and craft shops across the country (suggested retail price \$36.95).

"The peak age for involvement in art for Americans is about 8 or 9 years because of emphasis on art in primary schools," said Steven B. Golden, Binney & Smith's marketing manager, at a participatory

demonstration of the method to the art press at a Manhattan hotel.

"By the ages of 14 and 15, involvement has dropped about 85 percent, so that only 5 percent of the adult American population is actively involved in art. There was hope that the paint-by-number method of instruction might involve more people in art, but it didn't work out. We think Createable Painting kits are the answer."

The kits, created with the advice of professional artists, are designed to teach basic painting techniques, including special handling of brushes and palette knives. There are four different kits with four guide paintings in the Createable Painting line now. Additional kits offering a higher level of accomplishment will be introduced in the coming year.

The kits include a canvas panel, brush, palette knife, palette paper, Liquitex acrylic paints, a paint measuring guide for mixing, a stencil-like drawing aid, and a wooden frame. The illustrated, step-by-step instruction book is easy to follow and uses professional art terms to describe various techniques. This is not a rainy day diversion for tots but a teaching aid for serious novices from 14 to 80 years of age, a distinction implicit in the price of the kit.

Although the beginner recreates the guide painting, there is plenty of room to exercise his own imagination by adding personal touches to the original composition. A painting can be completed in two evenings of concentrated work but most artists will want to go back and "touch up," which is easy to do with fast-drying, water solvent

acrylic, preferred to oil by many contemporary artists.

"This can be the first positive experience with art that most people have had since the fourth grade," said Golden. "A lot of people who claim they never could draw a straight line will be surprised to learn that they can paint, even though they may not have real artistic ability. Talent isn't the issue. Createable Painting teaches the craft of art, which can be learned by anyone."

Binney & Smith tested the method on several groups, including school students and some of its 1,500 company employees. Golden said most of the "guinea pigs" were amazed at their dexterity and proud of their finished, framed painting.

"The framing is very important in reinforcing the painter's opinion of his own ability and of

his satisfaction in his work," said Golden. "It ensures that the painting will be hung and will be the subject of comment and praise from the painter's family and friends. That is very important."

A three-hour demonstration session was both enjoyable and inspirational, although the size of the only brush in the kit proved inadequate for fine brushwork and the subject of the painting, entitled "Mountain Reflections," seemed banal.

Several of those participating who had previous art training but no longer painted said they'd like to go back to art school as a result of the experience. Most beginners said they'd like to try one of the other kit paintings — "Autumn Beauty," "Lighthouse Point," and "Parisian Scene" (the best of the lot).

'Stripes' has its funny moments

By K. McElroy

Battalion Staff

"Stripes" is like a home-cooked meal when you're away — everyone remembers Mom's once-a-month juicy fried chicken, but no one recalls her once-a-week leftover goulash a la Gravy Train.

When Bill Murray's latest comedy is funny, it's extraordinary and quite memorable. When

it isn't, it's not necessarily bad — just totally forgettable.

Practically everyone has seen the television previews for "Stripes," which is being billed as the military version of "Animal House." And the preview includes some great scenes — the soldiers marching to the beat of "Doo Wah Diddley" and breaking into formation to the rhythm of Sly Stone's "I Want

To Take You Higher." However, previews for comedy movies sucker the poor consumer into paying \$4 for a film in which all the good scenes could be and often are contained in a 60-second spot.

"Stripes" does have more scenes even funnier. There's a marvelous bit when Murray's new platoon gathers to get acquainted, and everyone tells his

own story — "My name is Francis, but everybody calls me Psycho. If anybody calls me Francis, I'll kill him." And then the scene in which Murray, with shades of John Belushi's lone speech in "Animal House," inspires the platoon to practice for the basic training graduation. (Who'll ever forget "Old Yeller"?)

Still, the film isn't one belly

laugh after another. But lucky for us, the good of the film (totalling about 15 minutes)

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more than makes up for the rest of film.

The premise isn't that unique. Bill Murray is a photographer who can't keep a job or his girlfriend, so he joins the army to get a grip on who he is and to meet girls. Shades of "Private Benjamin"?

Hollywood (both the film and television industries) operates this way — if a movie is successful, it's going to be remade in some shape or fashion because Hollywood likes formulas. Films should work with the correct and tested amount of jiggle and giggle producing (execs hope) an extremely predictable and large sum of money.

But this formula film is better than most. "Stripes" is blessed with the extremely talented Harold Ramis, who plays Murray's best friend. Ramis, who co-wrote "Stripes," "Animal House," "Meatballs," and actually directed "Caddyshack," only took the role when director Ivan Reitman could find no one else to be as mellow as the part requires. Ramis possesses the charm of Shirley Temple laced with the sincerity of the Cheshire cat, and is the perfect balance for Murray's moronic style.

"Stripes" does have the typical formula comedy plot, meaning it occasionally borders on absurd (only in Hollywood could one platoon almost start World War III). But at least this formula sometimes works. And "Stripes" has just enough good scenes to make it a blue-ribbon movie.



All is fair in love and war for Bill Murray and co-star P.J. Soles in "Stripes." The comedy features Murray as a wacky recruit who adds his own flair to the Army.

"Stripes" is showing at Plitt Cinema I & II in College Station.