



MSC committees bring art to A&M

By TRICIA PARKER
Staff Writer

Art, said philosopher John Dewey, is an experience, and a measure of the quality of a civilization. To some, this puts Texas A&M near Snook on the civilization scale. In fact, arts — performing, visual and literary — are thriving on a small scale at the University.

While committees like OPAS and Town Hall bring symphonies, ballets and concerts, other lesser known committees in the MSC, including the Visual Arts Committee and the Literary Arts Committee work to make art accessible to students and faculty on an daily basis.

Joe Arredondo, coordinator of University Art Exhibits, says art isn't something to be cordoned off for one week a year or restricted to an occasional trip to a museum.

"Art's Week, what's that?," he says. "Does that mean everyone is supposed to go out and hang pictures? No, art is part of our daily life. It is part of life."

Arredondo coordinates exhibits in five galleries across campus. These include the Helen Perry exhibit now in the MSC gallery, the Benz floral collection in the horticulture building, an art faculty exhibit in Rudder Exhibit hall, as well as displays in the medical school and Langford Architecture Center.

"Art has gotten very trendy," he says. "When I got into this years ago you couldn't get anyone into a museum. Now, if you go on a Saturday, they're always full. It's like plants a few years ago, when everyone really got into them."

He says he is pleased with the heightened awareness of art here at A&M.

"I think it is very encouraging that the Dean of Medicine is interested in art, that the Dean of Agriculture thinks art is important," he says. "I think it is very encouraging that there is an interest in aestheticism in subjects not normally associated

with art."

Arredondo says he wants to give faculty and students at A&M a view of art that is more integrated with their everyday lives.

"Art is about experience," he says. "It's more than painting. It is the performing arts, sculpture and writing, and triggering the aesthetic sensibilities."

Pat Zinn, special event coordinator for the Visual Arts Committee, says before they can trigger anyone's aesthetic sensibilities they must attract them to the galleries in the first place.

"No one is going to make them come in and see pictures they don't want to see," he says. "Instead of making people come to us, like we have in the past, we want to go out to them."

Visual Arts, which is in charge of procuring and promoting shows for

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the MSC Gallery, sifts through suggestions and picks out shows, booking the biggest two to three years in advance. To get exhibits of high quality and diversity, they beg and borrow collections whenever they can.

"There was one guy last year who billed himself as the Rembrandt of the '80s but his work wasn't so great," Zinn says. "Otherwise we go to the museums and beg. We want to have something for everyone."

Zinn says some people are put off by art because they think they won't understand it.

"But art doesn't have to be deep in symbolism," he says. "It should evoke a gut reaction, either 'I love it,' or 'I hate it.'"

Coming Oct. 9-13, is a sword collection which the committee was

able to beg from a private collection. The collection, which visited the Kimball Museum of Art in Dallas last year, will be accompanied by films, lectures and videos from the Japanese consulate.

The next exhibit, from Nov. 14-20, will be a video installation, designed to involve the viewer. The walls of the gallery will be covered up, and a camera focused on a pressure plate will operate when the viewer steps on the plate. By looking at a monitor, the viewer will interact with the camera, creating video art.

"I don't expect everyone will like it," Zinn says, "but I want to offer the opportunity for people to see and to learn that art can be in many different forms."

The third exhibit from Nov. 21 until the end of the term, will be pieces of art created by local women who conduct tours of Rudder Exhibit Hall

collections. Called a docent display, it will include the best pieces submitted to the committee.

Zinn says he would like to see large exhibits integrating all the galleries on campus and art not restricted to the exhibit halls.

"We want to expand across campus," Zinn says. "Not necessarily exhibit-wise but with other forms of art like sculptures on the lawn or chalk drawings (on sidewalks). We've done performance pieces here, and whether people realize it or not, they're being exposed to art."

Exposure to art is the first step in educating people about it, says Carol Ross, vice-president of special events for the Visual Arts Committee.

"Folks here are not ignoramuses," she says. "They just haven't been

exposed to art. You have to learn visual literacy, start with a sense of aesthetics and move from there."

For Arts Week, the committee plans to increase awareness by displaying abstract art, created by new members of the committee, behind the Academic Building every day, says committee chairman Emily Lee.

"We want some reaction from the campus," she says. "Some reaction — whether positive or negative — it's still a reaction. Instead of ignoring what's happening around us, to get people to open up and let the world in."

The committee also hopes to display student art on easels in the MSC lounge and asks interested students to bring their pieces by. Ross says she thinks arts at A&M are becoming more popular because the demographics of A&M are changing.

"More and more folks coming to A&M are interested in the soft sciences," she says. "Before, the student body was always fairly homogenous but now it's becoming more diverse."

This diversity includes the growth of the Literary Arts Committee which had its genesis in a sub-committee of Visual Arts. Paul Henry, adviser for the committee, says it provides a service for young writers that didn't previously exist.

The committee, which produces the literary magazine Litmus, sponsors workshops and seminars, Henry says, and hopes to bring in professional writers to work with committee members.

"They're trying to develop the committee in two ways," he says. "First, to broaden the literary experience for the whole university and second to develop the individual committee members' interest and talent."

Because the committee is still small, Henry says everyone has a chance to get involved.

"Here they have the opportunity to roll up their sleeves up and really get with it," he says. □

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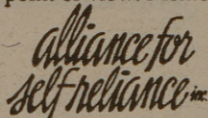
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