

Art of Anthropology

Students get credit for course by volunteering for museum

BY EMILY HARRELL
The Battalion

A new non-profit organization and a Texas A&M professor have given an A&M anthropology class the opportunity to bring a new art exhibit to the Brazos Valley Museum in Bryan.

The exhibit, "Art and Artifacts from Millennia Past," was developed by the non-profit organization the School of Expressive Culture (SEC) in collaboration with A&M, and was headed by Dr. Carolyn Boyd, who is a professor of anthropology and vice-president of the SEC.

Boyd said she got the idea for the exhibit project in Spring 1999, but the project and its related course, Anthropology 489, The Art of Anthropology, did not reach fruition until Fall 1999.

She said that making a class out of the exhibit stemmed from her enthusiasm for the project as well as her desire to give the experience of organizing an art exhibit to her students.

"I think that one of the things that's really lacking for many of the students is that hands-on experience," Boyd said.

The class allowed 13 students the opportunity to help get "Art and Artifacts From Millennia Past" displayed in Bryan. Led by Boyd, the class divided into tasks such as promotion, layout, research, labeling, audio setup, and more.

"They are [the students] so proud. They have done something

This is really for the community," Boyd said. "We really needed to break down the walls between academia and the community. They'll never forget this."

Boyd said not only have the students from the "Anthropology of Art" class gotten involved in the project, but students in Anthropology 205 have donated over 500 volunteer hours as well.

And their work is not done yet. She said students will continue to volunteer as docents in the museum and will walk patrons through the exhibit, explaining the items on display.

Jessica Lee, administrative assistant and museum coordinator for the SEC and a senior anthropology major, said, "Art and Artifacts From Millennia Past" demonstrates how much can be learned about cultures from their artwork and the concept of "expressive culture."

She said the phrase "expressive culture" is used to describe anything about a certain culture that is expressive, such as art, music or poetry. In anthropology and archaeology, the study of expressive culture is a new and exciting field.

"No one ever wanted to study [expressive culture] before, because they said it was too objective. So [archaeologists] would have rock shelters with rock art on the wall. They would excavate the rock shelters and make their notes and then mention at the bottom of the page, 'Oh, and there's rock art on the wall,'" Lee said.

Boyd said her study of expressive culture for "Art and Artifacts From Millennia Past" has opened her eyes to how similar all humans are.

"By all means, I have realized that we are not very different. That we're all the same. That art is essential for survival. Like I've said a thousand times: Not art for art's sake, but art for life's sake. By using the art of contemporary societies, I have begun to under-

stand the art of 4,000 years ago, and it's because we are so similar," Boyd said.

Lee said that "Art and Artifacts From Millennia Past" will contain never-before displayed art and artifacts from three cultures, including the Kalahari San Bushmen of South Africa, the Huichol Indians of Mexico and prehistoric Texas Indians from the Lower Pecos region.

She said the San Bushmen benefited from the research done for the exhibit because they were able to identify their South African ancestors by studying their ancient rock art which will be on display.

The exhibit also includes a 4,000 year old yarn painting by the Huichol Indians, provided by the Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory, and some replicas of the Huichol's ancient artwork. A&M students helped to make it happen.

"It doesn't matter the time or place [the art work is from]. That's really not as important as the fact in general that humans use their art — whether it be paintings or sculptures or

poetry or theater — as a form of communication and celebration of who they are and what that is," Lee said.

"Art is power, and people just don't think of it that way."

Lee said that while the unfinished exhibit opened Feb. 12, a grand opening celebration is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 19.

The celebration, which is open to the public, will begin at 10 a.m. and will have activities such as spear throwing, basket weaving, paint making and yarn painting. Museum tours will run all day.



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