

Illustration workshop encourages students

By Jodi Schneider McNamee
Correspondent

Opportunity knocked for students of all ages when illustrator Dave McMacken from Astoria held an art seminar at Sisters High School last Thursday.

When Bethany Gunnarson, Sisters High School art teacher, walked into McMacken's gallery, Ratz & Company, in Astoria while on vacation, she was impressed with his illustrations. She asked McMacken to come to Sisters to do a workshop and he agreed.

"This is a wonderful chance for my students to see some professional artwork, and Dave will be talking about life experiences and careers in art," Gunnarson said.

McMacken's career has spanned over five decades of professional work, from album covers to video game covers and movie theater posters to the harbors of Astoria.

McMacken discussed his work methods, the importance of drawing and computer skills, and where the line between a painter and a commercial illustrator divides.

"Drawing skills are the basics of all illustrating, your ability to draw sets you apart from other artists," said McMacken. "So keep your sketchpads with you all the time and sketch. Drawing is the whole enchilada with illustration."

The seminar was an opportunity to learn about the tradition and heritage of illustration and how it evolved.

"An illustration is the act of telling a story through a drawing, sketch, painting, etc. using a graphical representation," McMacken said. "The drawing has to be striking and interesting to look at. It's commercial art, and that's what I am, a commercial artist who is a freelance illustrator."

"Illustration itself is an early American tradition, and it came about a couple

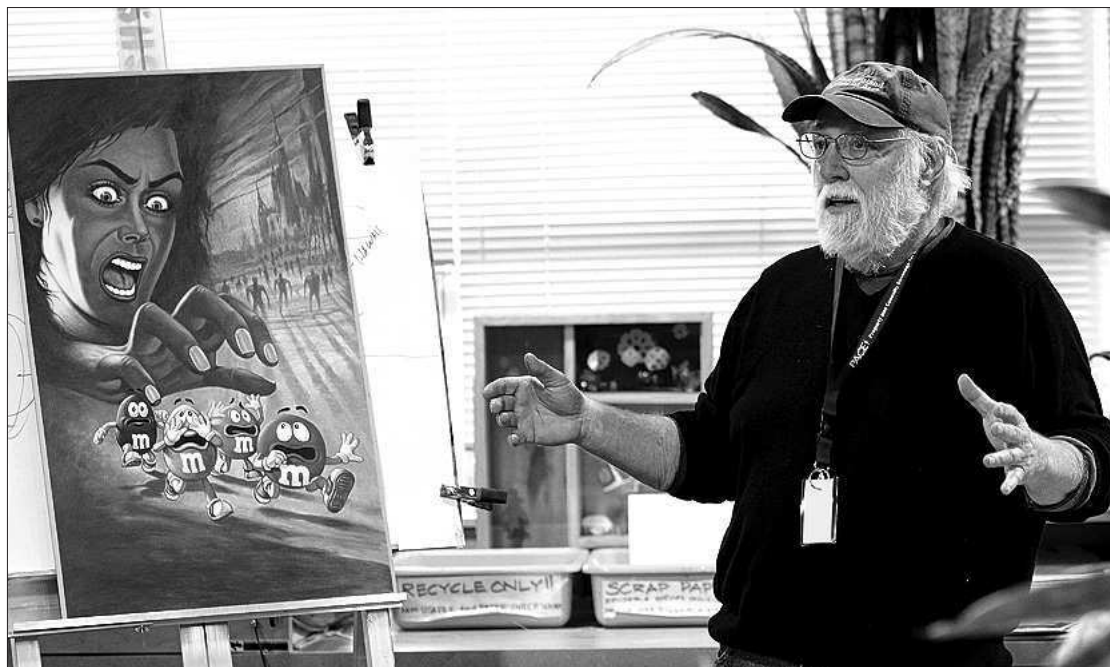


PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Dave McMacken and his poster "Attack of the Humans" that is currently in movie theaters.

of centuries ago. It actually originated in Europe, and as technology evolved illustration evolved. So we can think of the first painters or illustrators as entertainment. Painting at salons in Europe was a way of entertainment at the time. People went to see the show, just like you go to the movies."

McMacken explained the relevance of learning about the few famous artists that mastered the art of illustration.

"Howard Pyle was always considered to be the father of American illustration. He was responsible for training many people in his art class. One of his most famous students was N.C. Wyeth, he became one of America's greatest illustrators, and his son Andrew Wyeth was probably the most famous painter in the country."

McMacken mentioned numerous art schools and how they differed, and which would be the best choice for a career in illustration. He also emphasized how important a portfolio is for the artist's finest artwork. Every illustrator's portfolio communicates a message about the artist.

"When getting into an art school you're going to need a magical thing called a portfolio. A portfolio is a constant

thing with art and you are fine-tuning it with each job," McMacken said.

McMacken also discussed the "behind-the-scenes" process he went through for one recent commissioned illustration he developed for M&M'S candy, titled "Attack of the Humans," a poster point-of-purchase display that is in movie theaters now.

He encouraged students to continue to study and practice their craft.

"Take every drawing and painting class you can get your hands on, it all adds

up for better skills and for your repertoire. There are all kinds of categories of illustration that you can go into, such as book covers, comic books, even animation for films. There are also all different ways to make a living at being a freelance illustrator, too. But remember you'll need 12 to 20 pivotal pieces of your work in a portfolio. Just do the best job you can, and the benefits will pay off the more you practice."

For more information visit www.mcmackengraphics.com.

Sisters salutes...

• Susan Springer wrote:
A big thank-you to The Roundhouse Foundation for funding the new Jazz Ensemble at Sisters Middle School.

This mixed-grade ensemble is led by Tyler Cranor, who joined Sisters Middle School as the music director at the beginning of this school year. Tyler's goal is to grow and re-energize the music program, develop students' musical skills and bring awareness and pride to the music program.

When these budding musicians have practiced a little more, they'll take their combo on the road around Sisters, so stay tuned for some cool jazz! Thanks, Roundhouse, for making it possible!

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