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Rice's project for his master's degree will be a number of art pieces about the Willamette River. Photo by Dave Kao

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Willamette River inspires artist

By Melissa Martin
Of the Emerald

The Willamette River rolls through Ed Rice's mind like the Tombigbee River 12 miles away from his Mississippi home used to do.

Rice, a master of fine arts degree candidate and GTF for Prof. Laverne Krause at the University has paintings and prints on display in Gallery 141 in Lawrence Hall. Today is the last day for the display.

When Rice was biking one day, he stopped to sketch the Willamette River, came back to his Lawrence Hall studio and created a silkscreen that expressed his experience on that landscape.

"My ideas come from everyday life, from landscapes and places I've been to. Maybe something happened to me at that place," Rice says.

The Tombigbee river became a "pork barrel," project when a Corp of Engineers turned it into a waterway, bulldozing through trees and curves in the river and creating stagnant ponds. Now engineers want to build water pumps to correct the situation.

"I think they were trying to ensure themselves more work. They won't admit they were making a mistake," he says.

"They (the people of the area) had been sold a lot of B.S."

Rice came to Oregon after graduating from Belhaven College in Jackson where he left a small

community of artists behind in Mississippi. His friends told him it was beautiful here.

"People are politically aware here," Rice says. The Tombigbee River scandal never would have happened in Oregon, he says.

Because Rice doesn't want to have tunnel vision, he doesn't consider himself just a painter or a printmaker. He is an artist first, he says.

"The ideas should come most importantly and secondly would be the media by which you express those ideas," he says.

Rice thinks every piece hanging in the gallery could have something more. In this way, he is a perfectionist.

"He's been the most committed, knowledgeable, silk screen printer that's been here since I've been here — 13 years," says Ken Paul, print making professor in the University fine arts department.

"He's very talented," Paul says.

According to Paul, artists may have trouble communicating their ideas because viewers don't always see the artist's message. "His images rely on representations," Paul says.

Printmaking is not just reproducing a piece of art, Paul says. The printmaker is creating while he is printing. Not all the decisions about what will be in a piece are made before the work is done.

Rice's terminal project for his master's degree will be a series of pieces about the Willamette River.

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