

Maude Kerns Art Center has classes, exhibits



The 96-year-old Maude Kerns Art Center is currently displaying exhibits entitled "Four Women Artists" and "Kids for Conservation."

By Sally Murdoch
Emerald Contributor

The building now known as Maude Kerns Art Center can boast three things.

First, this year marks its 96th birthday. Secondly, it is Eugene's only non-profit art center. And, thirdly, the woman whose name it bears was so riveting in her personality and achievements that she was called "The Dutchess" during her 26-year professorship at the University.

This learned woman, Maude Irvine Kerns, bought the building for the Eugene Art Center in 1958 after she had built a name for herself as a devotee to the study of the arts, an educator and a philanthropist.

As a well-rounded professor, she traveled the world extensively in her quest to find new forms of art, and was said to have brought a greater understanding of Oriental art and culture to University students in the 1930s.

In 1961, four years before her death, Kerns approved the purchase of the present center at 1910 East 15th Avenue which took on her name.

She proceeded to lay down three basic aims for the center: "To advocate and promote visual arts programs for all ages, to have a wide variety of gallery exhibits, and to provide active support for local artists."

Although the center does not have the capacity for permanent collections, it hosts six

shows per year, displaying the works of over 200 artists with varying themes.

Wendy Wintrode, a graduate of the University's School of Journalism and Northwest Christian College, has been the director of public relations for about a year. Her commitment to the center stems from the center's willingness to offer the community a variety of visual arts.

Wintrode has currently been coordinating the "Art and the Vineyard" show for this year. She is "amazed by all of the talent that exists in Eugene," and pleased that this event "shows all of the aspects of offering the community free arts and entertainment that wouldn't be possible without

the support of sponsors."

"Art and the Vineyard" is a July show that runs annually at Alton Baker Park. The event, which is in its eighth year, is put on by the center and sponsored by local businesses. All proceeds go to benefit the center.

The exhibit features Oregon wine tasting, children's events, garden exhibits, over 100 local artists' shows, food booths and crafts. The festival runs for three days and usually sees a turnout of over 30,000 participants.

Also occurring yearly is the December holiday sale, which provides unique works of local artists for gift-giving. "Oregon Made for Interiors" is another annual exhibition showcasing traditional as well as modern furniture pieces, many of which are University students' works.

Currently, the Maude Kerns Art Center features an exhibit entitled "Four Women Artists," along with a one-wall side show entitled "Kids for Conservation."

The exhibits, which run through February 22, is a show featuring three female sculptors — Nance Emmett, Aimee J. Mattila and Jana Viles-Simpson. Also featured are works by the late artist Nell Best, who died in June 1990.

Best was a Eugene resident who received her bachelor of fine arts degree from the University and was commissioned as a mural painter by the Federal government in the 1930s.

"Kids for Conservation," is a show devoted to children's works that portray through art what the children have learned through recycling.

Clare Feighan, administrative director of the art center, was a retail manager at the Made in

Oregon store before she was offered the position four months ago.

She has been recognized in the community for volunteer work with the Oregon Country Fair and The Saturday Market, where she said her training in business merged with her experience in the arts.

As director, Feighan oversees seasonal art classes, a ceramic and printing studio on the premises (Called Club Mud and Oregon Printmakers), the finances of the center and internal communication.

"Eugene has a reputation as an artistic community," she said, realizing the impact the arts can have on Eugene residents. "It is easy to live here with not a lot of money, and for art, the city is open to new ideas."

For University students, the art center is "a wonderful place to take art classes, to get hands-on experience in the art world through volunteer and intern programs or just to visit once a month," said volunteer coordinator Bernice Jinkerson.

Students' works are also accepted readily, though space fills early and quickly for shows. Artists are asked to submit portfolios to the center's 15-member board during the "Call to Artists" session each season.

Memberships begin at \$25 and include discounts for classes and workshops at the center, invitations to events, a newsletter and class schedule, a 10 percent discount at the center's gift shop and free admission to the Portland Art Museum.

The center is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, and 1-5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Admission is free.

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