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New Zone attempts to bring delight, artistry to Eugene with dada exhibit

Several local dada artists contribute to the gallery with pieces designed to 'disgust or delight' viewers

By Ryan Nyburg
Senior Pulse Reporter

As I stood in the gallery of the New Zone Art Collective looking at a bleeding revolver fastened to a dinner plate by a giant nail, the question

"Is this art?" ran around my brain. How was your weekend?

The New Zone Collective was established in 1982 by a group of local artists who wanted to foster experimental visual arts in Eugene. Their current showing is entitled "Nu: Dada-Lies, Deceptions and Rumors" and will be running until Nov. 30. The exhibit is centered around a collection of anti-art dada pieces put together by the collective's members and displayed for the general disgust or delight of the viewing public. I say "disgust or delight" because dada is an art form that never seems to be viewed with disinterest. Reactions are never ambivalent.

The dada movement began in Switzerland during World War I both as an artistic protest to the war and the perceived madness of the human race. Dadaists believed that since life is without reason, why should art be?

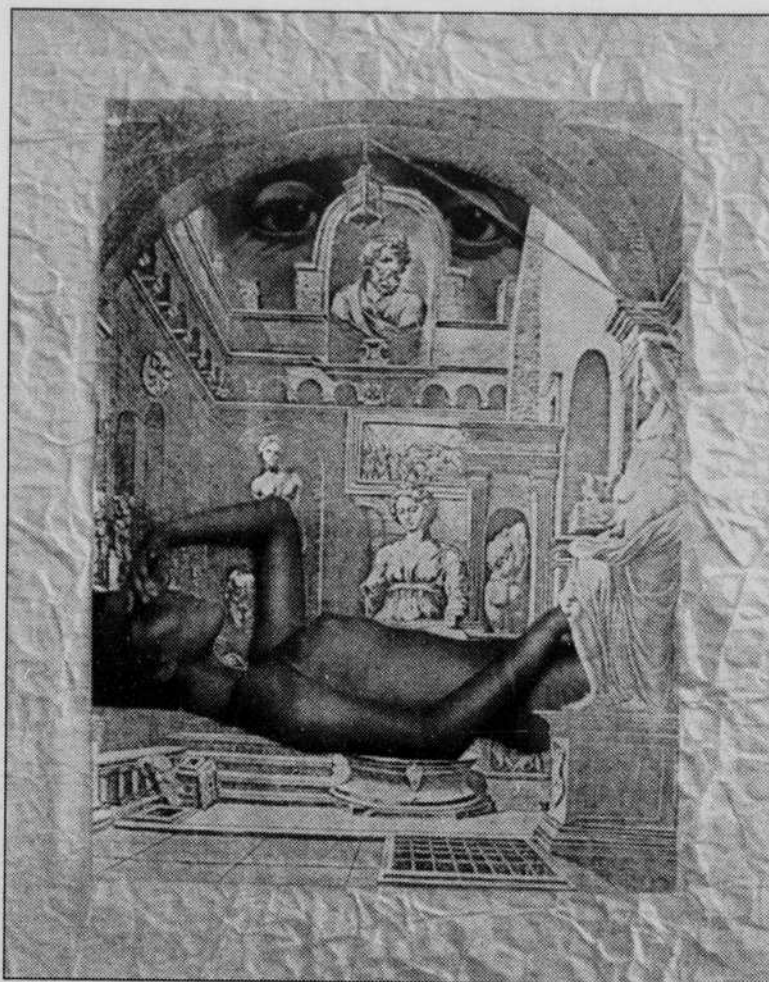
The original dadaists, along with their predecessors, created an art form that defied meaning, boundaries and common decency. By

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

nature, this kind of anti-art defies criticism since it does not ask to be taken on a technical level, but rather, on a more abstract, instinctual one. Hence the question, once again: Is this art?

I would have to answer that it is. Many of the pieces, particularly the sculptures, look like the kinds of things bored children put together out of broken toys. But this is not to say that they are amateurish. While someone might look at a piece and say "Anybody could do that," it only means they are playing into the dare posed by art forms like dada, which is "If anyone can do it, why aren't you?" Punk rock had the same appeal musically, and in the same way dada led to the more academic surrealist movement, punk led to a more artistically focused independent scene in the 1980s. Amazing how these connections are made.

As for what the New Zone crew has done, much of the work here carries



Lauren Wimer Photographer

James Rich's work 'Eyes of the Beholder' is one of several dada pieces on display at the New Zone Art Collective. A group of local artists started the gallery in 1982.

on the same spirit of the original dadaists, and a few of them rank up there as truly inspired works. Shane A. Fortner's "Silence in the Sound" is one example. It consists of a pair of disembodied feet chained to a floor, with a transparent sheet containing a poem hanging above them. Like all good absurdist works, it defies real meaning while courting around it and just barely touches the edge of being defined.

The more humorous "From Pumpkins Came Barbies" created by Martin Steiner is another nice piece. The title

ought to explain it well enough, and I was gratified to see that he was asking only \$20. It's in my price range, but I'm not sure where it would go in my apartment.

Will Baby's "The Sword of Damocles" carries on the proud tradition of war protest through absurdity (after all, what two concepts fit together better?). The piece is comprised of a large bomb suspended over the heads of a mother and child. Another good piece by Wm. M. Baby (related to the above artist perhaps?) is "Leave a Message ...," an answering machine with a giant tack stuck through it. Once again, great absurdist art.

Steve LaRiccia uses a more modern medium with his "Dada-Self Copy," a self-portrait made with a photocopier. Richard Pickering's "A Meeting" is a spooky piece of work made up of pieces of bone held to a chunk of wood, like bugs in an entomology display. Price tag: \$1,000,000. Too bad I don't get paid until the end of the month.

The show's success can be measured simply by the reactions of passersby. Most people looked in, shook their heads and walked away just a tad bit faster. Not everyone though. While the new Ken Kesey statue across the street got a bigger audience while I was there, New Zone had its share of interested patrons. And deservedly so, as the art collected for this show represents an important cultural movement — one that should not be ignored.

I thought for a while that I might even make my own contribution to the show. I could stand in the window with a title and a price tag on me and see how people reacted. I obviously didn't do it, which I guess goes to show this isn't as easy as it looks.

The New Zone Art Collective is located at 1 E. Broadway.



Lauren Wimer Photographer

Chris Surbaugh's piece, '#2 Cyclust', is going for \$99 at the New Zone Art Collective.

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