

# Handicap proves 'little inconvenience' for artist

Since Monday there has been a new art exhibit displayed in the Pauling Center. Upon looking at the framed mandalas, acrylic designs and sculpture encased in glass, the casual observer may assume the artwork was stamped out by an artist who has had years of practice to perfect each craft.

Yet this is not the case. The artwork is being shown as part of Handicapped Awareness Week and was created by Roger Hodge, an art student of only two years at Clackamas Community College.

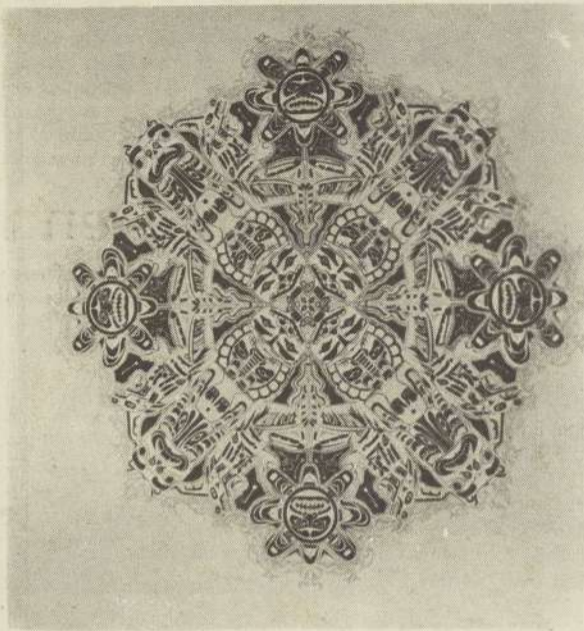
Hodge will be graduating in the spring with an associate of arts degree, and to him his work is much more than art. The acrylics, sculpture, and mandalas (circular, pen-and-ink works) are symbols of achievement, of having met a great challenge, while giving him a new, positive outlook toward his future.

Hodge originally did not plan to become an artist. He first came to the College in 1969 after graduating from Milwaukie High School. He later transferred to Oregon State University, where he received his masters in education.

Shortly after he began teaching as an industrial arts teacher in the Portland public schools in 1974, Hodge was diagnosed as having MS (Multiple Sclerosis), a disease which cripples and can destroy vital parts of the nervous system. He was in his early 20's then. "January 22--that's one day I'll never forget," Hodge said in remembrance of his diagnosis.

It has now been more than 10 years since that fateful date. Hodge described the years between as being full of ups and downs. In order to keep from aggravating the disease, he eventually had to give up teaching.

It wasn't until two years ago that Hodge's life took a dramatic turn. "I decided to get back



Hodge's mandala depicts Northwest Coast Indian symbols.

and be with people, and at the same time find a job that I could handle," he said. He returned to the College and enrolled in a variety of art classes, including basic design, art history, painting, sculpting, drawing, and commercial arts.

Today Hodge has designed several mandalas depicting symbols of the Northwest Coast Indians and is nearly finished with a wax statue of a hunting dog, which will be cast in bronze. These two aspects, the Northwest Coast Indians and hunting, are often his inspirations for designing his artwork, which he says "Touches a certain place in my heart or soul."

Hodge also works in sculptures of ivory, plaster, and clay, and has used acrylics for his commercial design class. Art Department Chairperson Norm Bursheim has described him as "a fast learner." Indeed, for a man who claims to have "just doodled" prior to taking the College's art classes, it is clear that Hodge has stumbled upon a hidden talent.

"Bursheim says you're always better than you think you are, and if you just try you might surprise yourself," he said. "I did surprise myself."

In looking at Hodge's work, whether it be

the time-consuming task of inking in a mandala (each one takes 56 hours to complete) or the delicately carved petals of an ivory rose, anyone can see that these pieces were designed by a man with the patience to produce beautiful work. He is a talented, sensitive artist.

As he sits at his desk working on mandala, Hodge appears to be no different than any other art student, which he said he likes. "Not everyone likes to be treated special. Handicapped people are like normal people, there's just a little inconvenience," he explained.

There are days, though, when Hodge said that he is unable to work. "Some days I can work, other days I don't even try to," he said.

Although he tries to think of himself as an artist instead of handicapped, Hodge hoped that his exhibit during Handicapped Awareness Week (April 25-30) might bolster the confidence of other students enough to give art a try. "If somebody sees my work, they might think, 'If a handicapped person can do that, maybe I can'," he said.

Despite his bout with MS, Hodge, while seeming modest about his varied accomplishments, says he "feels very lucky," and is quick to give thanks to the College art instructors from whom he has taken classes, including Bursheim and Leland John, for giving him the encouragement and confidence to achieve as much as he has these past two years. Hodge also expresses special thanks to Handicapped Specialist Debbie Derr. "Without her help maybe I would not have gone as far as I have," he said. He added that his wife and son have "given me a lot of encouragement."

Besides graduation, what else is Hodge looking forward to in the future? He plans to use his work to build up a portfolio, and then go out in search of a job in either graphic or commercial arts. "It gets me out of my house, and back into the world. To go back into society is my main goal," he said.

Hodge is confident that he will find a job somewhere. As for those who doubt that handicapped people can lead normal lives, he said "I might not be able to do what they're doing, but then again I might be able to do something they can't do."

How many students can say they know how to sculpt, paint and draw like a professional in only two year's time?



Roger Hodge



WAX FIGURE OF DOG is ready to be cast in bronze. Page 7

Story by Shelley Ball  
Photos by Dave VanAcker

