

DIVA's Grand Opening

African art, local artists

DIVA, the Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts, is now the largest gallery space in town. Several fine exhibitions are currently showing.

The Presence of Spirits, presented in cooperation with The Gallery at the Airport, features a portion of **Mary Johnston's** (Florence) private collection of mid-19th-century West African ritual art. Johnston inherited these tremendous pieces from her brother, Fred Welty, a 1946 UO graduate who in 1963 raised money for the first psychiatric clinic in Nigeria. In appreciation, Welty was presented with a wooden house post, on which carved figures represent the Yoruba religion and honor the power of *orisha* (guardian spirits). This gift sparked Welty's lifelong interest in West African art. Johnston, too, fell under its spell and graduated from UO in both anthropology and psychology.

While a UO student, Johnston met a Nigerian Yoruba chief and Ph.D. studying political science, Olu Adekanmbi, who became a lifelong friend. He gave Johnston three of the pieces in the show. The *Egungun Masquerade Costume* was his when he danced in traditional Egungun ceremonies as a teenager. The ancestor's spirit lives in the elaborate costume and participates in the dance.

Adekanmbi provided the *Beaded Crown* worn by Yoruba kings able to trace their lineage to Oduadua, creator of the earth. Adekanmbi also gave Johnston the bronze *Portrait of King Ewuare*, a great king of the Yoruba who governed in 1440 AD and unified warring factions through yearly religious ceremonies.

The Gelede society of the Yoruba People honors older women. On the *Gelede Head Dress*, the crescent moon lights the way at night when older women fly about as birds to reward good deeds and punish bad ones. A python represents their cool and calculating ways.

A *Hornbill Statue* is emblematic of the male-oriented Poro society of Ivory Coast. The hornbill takes a lifelong mate and is protective of its family. From the antelope culture of Mali come two *Antelope Masks* and the exquisitely stylized *Chiwara Head Piece*, all worn at dance ceremonies for good crops and healthy children.

The Yoruba People, who have the highest rate of twin births in the world, believe the souls of twins are locked together. If one dies, an *Ibeji* or twin figure is carved, into which the priest transfers the spirit of the twin. The mother takes it everywhere, feeds it, strokes it and treats it the way she does the live twin child.

This exhibit is powerful because these ritual objects are the real thing — they've been used and are genuinely imbued with

symbolic and spiritual significance. We may not share the belief that spirits once inhabited them, but the human spirit behind them is very real. "The more you learn about another culture," Johnston said, "the more you learn about yourself."

Some fine, recently crafted West African sculptures are available from **Molly Beauchamp's** personal collection in one of DIVA's two gift rooms.

In the other are pieces from members of the Local Clay ceramics guild. **Don Clarke**, **Thanhbinh Duong**, **Hank Murrow** and **Tom Rohr** offer a variety of earthy wood-fired stoneware vessels, while **Our Town Pottery's** platters and bowls go for Southwestern colors and motifs. **Karen Washburn's** *Oil Lamps* and *Teapot Forms* take whimsical shapes with a pleasant personality.

Faith Rahill applies a cane technique to stoneware, "piecing together different colored clays into solid blocks of pattern. These blocks are then sliced very thin and rolled onto a

Jerry Ross contributed three recent paintings: a landscape (*Trieste*), a portrait (*Angela*) and a study of Veronese's *The Feast in the House of Simon*. Similar in style, they are sketch-like, in muted tones, the paint thinly applied, with charcoal outlines sometimes allowed to show through. This approach works best in *Trieste* where it beautifully succeeds in evoking a melancholy view of roofs, hills and sea on an overcast day. It is however unclear what Ross's rendering of Veronese with Cézannesque brushwork accomplishes, being neither ironic statement, obvious homage nor theoretical commentary. Ross notes his "old master studies point the way back from deconstruction and conceptual art."

Tenold Peterson explores the idea of movement in three large abstract drawings that portray the gesture of the artist, the very act of making a mark on

naïve, folksy renditions of animals and people, but we are charmed.

DIVA provides a venue for both young and seasoned artists. UO freshman **Mackenzie Petersen** explores her way in different media and genres, from pastel or charcoal portraits to marker

drawings with intricate patterns and Keith Haring overtones. Teenage art is represented by **Sisters in Spirit**, featuring the 12 winners of the Eugene-Irkutsk Youth Art Exchange.

Photo Zone's Members' Choice includes highlights from 15 local photographers. Among gelatin silver prints, I noted **Eugene Tonry's** plant portraits, **Herman Krieger's** and **Richard G. Russell's** photographs of people, **Rob**

Sanov's and **Justin C.**

Williams's fine landscapes. I particularly liked **Patrick Plaia's** tiny format abstract beachscapes. **Gary Tepfer's** Ilfochrome color photographs, such as *Bighorn Sheep Horn*, are exquisite.

Photographer **David Joyce** (b.1946-d.12/03/03), creator of the Eugene airport flying-people mural, is commemorated with three of his trademark life-size photographic cutouts. A self-portrait of the artist is honored by flowers at his feet, which also re-creates the feel of Joyce's installations that combine three-dimensional objects and photographic cutouts. (A memorial service for David Joyce will be held at 2 pm Dec. 19 at the Center for Meeting and Learning at LCC.)

An interesting exhibit by students of UO faculty and architect **Otto Poticha** is devoted to architectural work-in-progress on the design of a Downtown Eugene Visual Arts Center — a "permanent home" for DIVA. This two-term project will be completed in March, and all 16 designs then exhibited. However, this preview is a great opportunity to observe the process of designing a building. It allows us to reflect in the intervening time on how we envisage the function and design of a downtown visual arts center. Dusting White's model includes curvy, sculptural elements and provides relief from the rectilinear elements dictated by the street grid.

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
TALL VASE BY THANHBINH DUONG, HEAD PIECE,
BASSA TRIBE, LIBERIA, BOX BY FAITH RAHILL.

slab," which she forms into a pot. Delicate black patterns embedded in cream or brown stoneware grace her platters, bowls and jars.

Mary Hindman's exquisite pieces bear witness to her wide-ranging creativity and skill. Several raku-fired *Boxes* create whimsical dwellings, some a smooth black with metal screws and an abstract motif reminiscent of mother-of-pearl inlay. Two sculptural wood-fired *Medium Teapot Forms* are wisely left unadorned as their form alone is aesthetically complete.

paper. The drawings have a musical quality befitting this notation of movement.

Family Fun displays art by Eric Petersen and his niece, Mackenzie Petersen. "In the beginning was the pun," Samuel Beckett said, which applies to print-maker **Eric Petersen's** rich imagination. In Petersen's whimsical etchings, imagery and titles provide visual and verbal puns that echo off each other, sparking complex associations. The delightful ambiguity of

Petersen's work forces us to entertain multiple perspectives at once. Thought-provoking connotations and a dark humor subvert the deliberately

