

An Informed Audience

Building a sense of artistic history in Eugene

Through the symbolic fabric of local art and life in a millennial mood of exile and vulnerability, I prepared my self for this year's judging the annual Mayor's Art Show as well as this year's version of the Salon des Refusés. Both exhibits are serious endeavors, important to many local artists whose selected artworks are showcased in the Hult Center's Jacobs Gallery; or those not accepted exhibited in an alternative site, the Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts, in the tradition of the French Salon des Refusés.

This year's Salon exhibits more than 200 artworks representing all forms of media, from Steve LaRicca's manipulated miniature-color photo to Annette Gurdjian's inkjet print, *Two Women Kissing*, which brings to mind surreal and romantic notions of art. The Salon lovingly debauches us with anarchy and perfect disorder where art interprets life and life interprets art.

The Mayor's Jacobs Gallery showcases 60 works in a manner that seduces us with the rhetoric of its presentation. In *Transition Zones: Leaving to Arrive* (oil and wax), Kathleen Caprario presents a minimal geometric and biomorphic painting that seduces us with mystery and spirituality. While *The Duel* (spray paint, shotgun blast and black-and-white photos of a U.S. \$10 bill), Tommy Waggener explores the contentious nature of politics past and present.

How important are these shows to artists living in Lane County? It seems to me that most artists in this community are less concerned about fame or making it into the latest version of Janson's *History of Art* than they are living here in relative comfort. So what if the city has only a few commercial galleries, no significant art market and a small group of critical reviewers (Sylvie Pederson and Bob Keefer) to help create a dialogue and build an informed audience? If an artist is lucky, his or her work will be accepted in the annual Mayor's Show, and if rejected, shown in the Salon. And if an artist is really lucky, he/she will be invited to have a solo or group showing at Maude Kerns, Jacobs Gallery, DIVA, LCC Art Department Gallery, UO Adell McMillan Gallery, or the UO Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. If an artist is really, really lucky, his or her next exhibit might be reviewed or pre-viewed in *Eugene Weekly*, *The Register-Guard*, *Lane Arts* or *Art Quarterly*.

There has to be more, a dialogue which creates an informed audience that is buying art for more than a decorative element to enhance a blank wall. We need a community that views art as an investment fostering further growth and an understanding of contemporary visual art. In many ways Eugene has come a long way in the past 10 years, with a First Friday Gallery Walk and the opening of the Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts.

What we still need, desperately, is a stronger sense of our own artistic history as a city. We need a sense that art made in Lane County can emerge from the sphere of private lives (whether those of artist, collector, or their friends) and take on a meaningfully public, historical dimension. What this means is a commitment to the ongoing preservation and re-examination of art exhibitions, particularly those in the non-profit sector, to mount analytical and critical historical exhibits. Finally, we must encourage the publication of exhibition catalogs, books and articles that document and examine the work presented. An excellent start toward the preservation of local art history would be informative catalogs of both the Mayor's Show and the Salon des Refusés.

Eugene artist Mike E. Walsh was one of three jurors for the 2005 Mayor's Art Show. His work will be exhibited at DIVA Nov. 5-Dec. 30 and at Maude Kerns next March.

TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN BY SHANNON WHEELER



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HIGH GROUND

In the event of a major Oregon disaster, we want our hospitals to be safe, accessible, and functioning — or do we? PeaceHealth has already chosen its Riverbend site on the McKenzie River. Now McKenzie-Willamette is considering several sites on the banks of the McKenzie or Willamette rivers.

A doctor friend of mine sounds these warnings: A major coastal earthquake, magnitude 9+, could breach any (or all) of the reservoirs in the Willamette-McKenzie watershed, flooding Eugene-Springfield beyond our imagination. A major volcanic eruption on South Sister's bulging side could melt winter snows, flooding Eugene-Springfield like we've never seen. Massive rains in the watershed could (again) bring massive floods — perhaps breaching some of the reservoirs and magnifying the disaster.

Have we not learned from the Katrina flood of New Orleans that, above all, hospitals must be open and functioning well during an emergency? Our emergency response would be abysmal if our two major hospitals were under water and damaged beyond recovery.

Please, McKenzie-Willamette, take the high ground.

Eldon Haines, Ph.D.
Eugene

CONFRONT DEFAZIO

The only way Congress can stop the Iraq war is to cut off funding for it. Yet Oregon's four Democratic reps — Blumenauer, Wu, Hooley and DeFazio — all voted for the 2006 Defense appropriations bill that included \$45 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In an August 18 e-mail DeFazio wrote, "I have voted for a couple of the more recent bills

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