

'DON'T DRAW A TREE. DRAW A PARTICULAR TREE.'

David McCosh at Karin Clarke Gallery

Standing in front of *Fall Creek*, a watercolor painting by David McCosh (1902–1981), I was aware there was someone else looking, too. Viewing the same artwork as someone else in a gallery or a museum can be awkward. Often one person will walk away to give the other their time with the piece. But not at the Karin Clarke Gallery on the day of curator Roger Saydack's talk about the Eugene artist.

The atmosphere in the gallery was social.

"You can tell this art is McCosh's work," the person said.

He was already familiar with the artist's work, as were so many others. The lively buzz that filled the gallery revolved around the more than 30 artworks on the walls by an artist some had known and others had studied under while he was art professor at the University of Oregon.

Fall Creek has a transparent stained glass feel to it. The design is an all-over pattern similar to others of McCosh's abstract landscapes. It is composed of fluid lines and wash laid down in splashes of color. There aren't details in it that you would associate with realism, but you can tell there is water, as well as green, yellow and orange leaves the color of fall. The painting is both abstract and relatable to what you might see if you were at the place the artist stood at the time of year he painted it.

Like a lot of other artists who moved out West from the eastern United States, McCosh was inspired by his new environment. Before he moved here his subjects were mostly human, like those in the drawing *Man and Woman at a Restaurant*. After he moved to Eugene he began to paint nature. He depicted landscapes at first and then evolved toward abstraction, though he did not think of himself as an abstract artist. He was grounded in reality, always beginning with observation.

The exhibit *Learning to Paint is Learning to See* reminds us of this by hanging photographs of correspond-



DAVID MCCOSH: 'FALL CREEK,' 1964

ing places in nature on the walls. During his talk, Saydack pointed to a tree in a photograph and then to a column of brush strokes in the painting *Tangle*. A collective sound of appreciation could be heard as people in the gallery recognized the tree in the painting — seeing what the artist saw.

"Don't draw a tree. Draw a particular tree," was advice McCosh gave to his drawing class, according to a former McCosh student who was at the gallery. "He detested stereotypes."

What's the difference?

You can draw a stereotype of a tree without looking at one. But in order to draw a specific tree — a real tree — you have to look. You can't make it up.

There's no lying in art.

This is why we use words like "immediate" or "truthful" to describe paintings done with brushstrokes that are visible, like marks made in drawing. And why no matter how abstract a painting of a landscape is, it can still be real.

David McCosh: *Learning to Paint is Learning to See* runs through April 1 at Karin Clarke Gallery, 760 Willamette Street. Hours are noon to 5:30 pm Wednesday through Saturday.

EUGENE ART TALK

BY BOB KEEFER

What's up with the city, the Hult and the former Jacobs Gallery?

It's been more than a year since the Jacobs Gallery closed its doors in downtown Eugene, another victim of — of what, exactly? The sluggish economy? City Hall's indifference to the visual arts? Poor management by the nonprofit organization that ran the Jacobs, created in 1987, on the lower floor of the Hult Center?

Pressed for an answer, I'd have to choose a bit of all of the

above. What I can't put my finger on, though, is this: Why hasn't the city gotten around to taking down the signs at the Hult Center that say "Jacobs Gallery"? You can still read the operating hours of the now non-existent art gallery. Do they think the Jacobs is magically going to resurrect itself?

I got the chance recently to pose that question to a couple city officials — Theresa Sizemore, the Hult Center manager, and Isaac Marquez, the public art manager. They're both friendly and hard working, and seem quite sincere in their explanations. And they both indicated that things just plain take a long time to accomplish when the city does them.

"The signage is part of an overall plan," Sizemore said. "And a lot of the signs are attached to the building ..."

The 35-year-old Hult Center is showing its age. Water began leaking into the lower levels of the building even before the Jacobs closed. There was fungus involved. Repairs involve

rebuilding a small commercial kitchen, and that means bringing the kitchen up to current health codes, which will make it bigger, and ...

Anyone who has remodeled a house will recognize this kind of mission creep.

"Construction could still impact the Jacobs space," Sizemore said.

Bigger questions still hover around the ghost of the gallery. What's the city's role in promoting visual art? Should it replace the Jacobs Gallery with another equivalent space? Or should it focus on other ways of presenting art, and other kinds of art besides paintings hung on walls?

"The visual arts fall between many models," Marquez said. "How many galleries have closed in Eugene in the last five years?"

More, I'd have to admit, than survive.

To its credit, the city spent some time in the past year trying to find another private group to operate something like the Jacobs, if only for the occasional

show. That never really panned out.

On the other hand, I haven't been totally convinced the city is behind the idea of another city-supported art gallery. More than a year ago, city staffers told the Cultural Services Advisory Committee that "the gallery model is not doing well, nationally, internationally or in our state."

The same could also be said about symphonic music, ballet and opera. Yet traditional nonprofit performing groups continue to operate in the Hult's two performance halls, though, of course, the ever-ailing opera is, once again, broke and in debt, and the Oregon Bach Festival has moved most of its operations back to the University of Oregon.

Sizemore says the city doesn't subsidize performances, not even for the Hult's six resident companies. So the city wasn't showing favoritism by cutting its \$30,000 annual subsidy to the Jacobs, leading to the gallery's demise; instead it was putting painters

and printmakers and sculptors on the same neutral financial footing as musicians and dancers and actors. (In fact, the Jacobs never paid rent on its space, so it came out ahead.)

Bottom line is this: If the visual arts world wants a visual arts center in Eugene, it's going to be up to those artists and their supporters to build it. I don't believe the city will stand in the way of a solid plan, but no one should wait around for City Hall to make the first move.

After all, Eugene can't even decide how to replace its now-demolished City Hall.

Some of you may recall Eugene Art Talk, the arts blog I wrote for a couple years between working for that other newspaper in town and taking up residence in here at *Eugene Weekly*. I didn't quite know what to do with the name, but I've grown fond of it. So here it is, on top of a new and occasional column about the arts world in and around Eugene.

Send comments, ideas, complaints and suggestions to bob@eugeneweekly.com.