



Photo by Dwight Caswell

Roger Ley, of Svenson, studies "Mia," a charcoal drawing by Cathy Locke of Novato, California.

Humanity on display

Clatsop Community College Art Center Gallery hosts the ninth annual international juried art exhibition 'Au Naturel: The Nude in the 21st Century'

Story by DWIGHT CASWELL

A decade ago, Kristin Shauck arrived at Clatsop Community College to teach art. She soon realized that it was difficult for her students to go to Portland or Seattle to study the work of artists painting the figure, "so I decided to bring world-class artists working with the figure to Astoria," she said.

It was an ambitious undertaking for a small college on the Oregon Coast, but "Au Naturel: The Nude in the 21st Century" is now in its ninth year. At the CCC Art Center Gallery now through March 5, there are 54 works on the gallery walls from a field of over 500 entries from 28 states, and from countries as far away as South Africa and New Zealand. No other event has brought the

college such worldwide attention.

But what is it about the nude? Why paint people without their clothes on?

For an artist, the nude makes sense on both technical and aesthetic levels. Astoria artist Noel Thomas said, "It's the most difficult subject to do well. If you are able to draw the human figure well, you can draw anything."

Rhonda Grudenic, a local artist who received a purchase award in an earlier "Au Naturel" exhibit, agreed: "While the human body is so familiar, the subtle nuances of the human form are extreme. Capturing those subtleties is the ultimate test of an artist's ability."

The nude has an intellectual and emotional content for artists as well. More than any other subject, the nude is about humanity. It is a search for self-understanding and com-

prehension of our place as human beings in the world.

This may make sense to most people, but it is likely that the vast majority of people who appreciate the nude cannot imagine themselves disrobing and standing in front of an artist or, worse yet, a group of student artists in a classroom setting. Yet there are always models; they are an essential element of any arts community.

Models don't do it for the money, either. It's hard work (try holding a pose for half an hour without moving), and it doesn't pay that well. In fact, because artists tend to be impoverished to some extent, many models work in trade for art. You can collect a lot of good art this way, but it doesn't pay the bills.

So what makes a good model, and why does he or she do it?

There is no such thing as a perfect body, so no artist expects that of a model. "The most important thing," said artist Osprey Cove, "is that the model is unself-conscious, comfortable in their own skin." Cove often works outdoors, and he said, "I don't ask my models to do anything I wouldn't, but you always have to deal with the sun, or lack of it, and wind, and the possibility that people will walk by."

Model Crystal Miller, who met the artist she works with most often in church, isn't concerned about the elements or the occasional bystander. "I don't think of what I'm doing as an individual but as part of the process. I'm participating in making art. It's absolutely collaboration. That's the cool aspect of it," she said.

This year's "Au Naturel" juror was Barbara Shaiman, an independent curator and art consultant based in Seattle. "My task as I saw it was to choose work that was both excellent



Photo by Dwight Caswell

Ron Barclay of Long Beach, Washington attended the "Au Naturel" opening reception Jan. 29. Behind him, from left, are "Ode to Man," oil on linen, by Linda Andrei of Ithaca, New York, which took third place in the exhibition; and "Spell Caster," a pastel by Paul Barton of Tumwater, Washington.

and representative rather than to attempt to create an exhibit with a particular point of view," she said. She wanted to see, "arresting work as well as technical proficiency" and "a personal vision, a passion for the work that makes it special." At the opening reception held Jan. 29 at the community college, she commented on the "many visions represented."

So did many of the visitors that crowded the gallery that evening. Maria Wendler of Astoria said she and her husband come to "Au Naturel" every year. "There's always something new and interesting," she said; "I like all the different depictions, and they all have the essence of the nude."

Another Astorian, John Goodenberger insisted that he didn't go for the free food, but because, "It's good art, and you see all the different interpretations of how to portray the human body."

That sentiment was again echoed by Kirsten Horning, an artist herself. She remarked on,

"the diversity of the images. Some are absolutely perfect, almost photographic. Others are simpler, almost primitive. It's interesting to see which paintings affect me emotionally, the overall feeling, whether it's restful or calm, or sort of apocalyptic."



Photo by Dwight Caswell

Maria Wendler views "Colorbomb," an oil painting by Carly Bodnar of Brooklyn, New York.

Carol Newman, Brownsmead art maven and member of the Arts Council of Clatsop County, said that "Au Naturel" was, "a fabulous show." She was there to "meet some of these fabulous artists and to support the local arts scene." She alluded to the diversity of the show in terms of "styles and bodies, men, women and children. The subject is the nude, but it's really about a good painting."

Ron Barclay of Long Beach, Washington,

summed up the feeling of most of those at the opening: "I just like painting. The appeal of the nude is that the body is a beautiful thing, and it's important to know how to paint it."

"The nude is inherently interesting because we are people," said Shauck. "As long as we've been around, we've been making images of ourselves. Art making is a process of discovery, and you have to be open to the journey."



Photo by Dwight Caswell

Artist Kristen Horning watches awards being presented during the reception. Behind her is "St. Severin, Preaching Melancholia," a mixed-media piece on paper by David Allison of Seattle, who won the Solo Show and Workshop Awards.

'Au Naturel'

On display now through March 5

CCC Art Center Gallery

1799 Lexington Ave., Astoria

<http://aunaturelart.com>

Gallery hours are from 8 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. The gallery is open on Sundays and holidays by appointment only.

'There is no such thing as a perfect body, so no artist expects that of a model'



Submitted photo

"Arden," an oil painting on canvas by Nicole Jeffords of Austin, Texas.



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Juror Barbara Shaiman speaks at the show's opening reception Jan. 29 in the CCC Art Center Gallery. Hanging on the wall, from left is "Beyond the Boundary of the Hedge: Margarita and His Errand," oil on canvas by Chris Sheridan of Seattle; and "Relaxed" by Nancy Van Allen of Port Townsend, Washington.