



“Shadow Myth: Io,” a graphite drawing by Ellen Soderquist of Dallas, Texas.



“Music Pausing For Love” by Bruce Erikson of Mainville, Ohio.

KNOWN *and* UNKNOWN WORLDS

THE 10TH ANNUAL JURIED EXHIBITION ‘AU NATUREL: THE NUDE IN THE 21ST CENTURY’ IS ON DISPLAY NOW AT CLATSOP COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Story by **DWIGHT CASWELL**

This year’s “Au Naturel: The Nude in the 21st Century” exhibit at the Clatsop Community College Royal Nebeker Gallery marks the 10th anniversary of a show that attracts both national and international interest. This year’s show is dedicated to the late Royal Nebeker, an internationally known artist and the chief driving force behind the level of excellence achieved by the CCC art department.

Art is one of the oldest expressions of the human mind, and the drive to produce art, to express oneself in this way, is a significant part of what makes us human. The nude is among the most ancient forms of art. It reflects our interest in ourselves not simply in terms of the beauty of flesh and form, but also in terms of who we are in relationship to the worlds we live in: natural, man-made, and an unseen world of spirit. Art at its best expresses the condition of being human: joy, terror, fear, anger, resignation. From lust to shame, it’s all there, and the nude has and does serve as a focus of our attempt through art to describe and to encompass the fullness of what it means to be human. “Au Naturel” provides modern examples of a form of expression that is almost as old as our species.

The nude in art is often thought of as primarily a Western phenomenon, particularly since the Renaissance, but the tradition is much older and more widespread. The earliest known figurative painting is about 30,000 years old, found in the Chauvet Cave in France, and it includes a fragmentary female nude. A little later the stylized “Venus” figures, small stone sculptures, were found from Europe to Siberia.

Art such as that of Africa, once thought “primitive,” frequently shows the nude form, and heavily influenced Picasso’s “African Period.” Voluptuous female nudes decorate Indian temples built over 2,000 years ago, and the nude is a frequent subject in international folk art to this day.

Ancient nudes were almost certainly related to and used in religious practices. A transition to more secular depictions, the nude as it is best known today, began in ancient Greece with depictions of the male nude as ideal heroes, gods,

and Olympic champions (with a healthy dose of homo-eroticism). The Greeks portrayed women primarily as goddesses, particularly Aphrodite, the goddess of love. With the rediscovery of the classical nude in the Renaissance, art began depicting the nude in both secular and religious works.

In “Au Naturel” you won’t find any direct descendants of Paleolithic art, but there

are works that reflect the classical nudes of Greece. Elena Wilkes’ “Claire” has the soft tonality of sculpture and a pose that evokes a statue of Aphrodite. Ellen Soderquist’s “Shadow Myth: Io” has a similar tonality and a pose and model that suggest an Olympian ideal. The most abruptly contemporary reference to classical sculpture has to be Linda Andrei’s “Three Graces Re-imagined.”



“Persephone (Homage to Cocteau)” by Robert Bibler of Salem.



“Mass Migration” by Michael Southern of Portland.



“Amanda Two” by Penny Treat of Long Beach, Washington.



“Blue Flowers in the Tile” by Troy Bunch of Washington, D.C.



“The Three Graces Re-imagined” by Linda Andrei of Ithaca, New York.



“The Green Room,” an oil on linen painting by Irvin Rodriguez of New York, New York.

In the 19th century, the secular nude came into its own, and the nude was used both to idealize the human form and to portray the nude in a lifelike way, which had the effect of shocking audiences of the time. In the mid-century, the realist Gustave Courbet’s unidealized women disgusted viewers used to the idealized depictions of the past, as did Édouard Manet’s revolutionary “Olympia,” a reclining nude on a bed,



“Faster” by Royal Nebeker of Gearhart.



“Au Naturel 4” by Kerry Conboy, Monterey, California.

staring directly at the viewer.

“Au Naturel” exhibits Bruce Erickson’s “Music Pausing for Love,” a throwback to the romanticism of the first half of the 19th century, which is enjoying a revival today. The simple authenticity of Irvin Rodriguez’s “The Green Room” suggests the realism that followed.

The influence of the Impressionists, with their bold use of light and color, is seen everywhere in art today, but at the Nebeker Gallery you are more likely to see the influence of artists who followed the impressionists. Michael Southern’s “Mass Migration” recalls, oddly, the post-impressionism of Gauguin, with a little socialist realism thrown in.

The influence of the modernists who built on and moved away from Impressionism is much in evidence in this year’s exhibition. Penny Treat’s “Amanda Two” owes much to Matisse, for example, and Reed Clark’s “Reclin-

ing Nude” reminds one of Modigliani. There is even an explicit reference to great art in another medium altogether, in Robert Bibler’s “Persephone (Homage to Cocteau),” presumably a reference to Jean Cocteau’s important “Orphic” trilogy, three films accomplished from 1930 to 1960.

Last and certainly not least, are two works by Royal Nebeker, “Faster” and “Sleeping Nude.” The influence of Expressionism and of Edvard Munch, whose prints he cataloged while a student in Norway, are clearly present in a style he nonetheless made entirely his own.

Nebeker’s work stands out in this show, but there are other artists in “Au Naturel” who walk the same path he did. That path is no less than the history of the nude in art, of the growing and changing ways in which we portray to ourselves the human presence in known and unknown worlds.