

The Observer, February 23, 2007

Volume XXXIX, Issue 18

CIA's Student Independent Exhibition showcases young talent

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When many people hear the word "art," especially paired with the word "exhibition," most think of a boring gallery, hung wall to wall with weird modern paintings that no one really understands, yet praises out of the fear of looking "uncultured." However, visitors of the Cleveland Institute of Art's latest offering, Student Independent Exhibition 61, need not fear; SIE 61 shatters all negative, pretentious expectations by putting on a stylish, innovative, and fun exhibit.

Upon walking into the Reinberger Galleries, located in the Gund Building of CIA, SIE 61 seems as though it is like most other shows. The medium-sized gallery has white walls and pale wood floors to avoid distracting visitors' eyes from the works of art on the walls. But as soon as the first piece of art comes into view, it's obvious that this is no ordinary exhibition.

SIE 61 contains art in almost every imaginable form. There are paintings, sculptures, blown glass pieces, ceramics, audio and video arts, photographs, enamel mosaics, fashion design, and even a piece called "Cram and Bust" by Leah Tacha, which is the largest work in the gallery. "Cram and Bust" is a three-dimensional piece with multiple colors of fabric formed into small bags and stuffed with newspaper and bricks. The bags line an entire alcove of the gallery, from the floor to the walls and ceiling.

The exhibit is open to any CIA student in any of the sixteen offered majors who wishes to submit some form of art. A small panel of jurors then decides which pieces shall be included. This year's jurors, Melanie Bilenker, Bjorn Copeland, and Jonathan Seliger, recognized that diversity was the inevitable theme of SIE 61, commenting "...[W]e tried not to let one way of working take precedence over the other. We tried to be attuned to the spirit and energy in each piece and let clarity of intent rule the day." The exhibit was also curated by two CIA students, Nicholas Moenich and Thomas Spoerndle, further adding to the uniqueness and innovation of the show.

Since there were so many art forms represented in the showing, it is natural to think those done in more traditional media would be overshadowed by the more abstract and atypical works. Keeping in line with the unique theme, that is not the case. There were a great multitude of works that stood out in the crowd, from every form or expression. "Sipping Wine," a charcoal drawing done by Amanda Cates of a woman drinking wine from above, is done in such striking detail that the subject seems to leap out from her place on the wall.

Some of the works were more humorous, like "Crush," by Oliver Ray. Ray took an Orange Crush bottle, and using glass-blowing techniques, he blew out the bottom into a large oval shape, making the entire bottle look like a new breed of squash. "Disposable Fashion," a piece by Brittany Ruccella, was a dress made of purple organic cotton with red accents, stitched to perfection. And the entire thing is recyclable. There is even a piece sculpted out of invisible tape; "Longboat," by Sean Eddy, is a small sculpture of a boat, complete with sails and oars, fashioned entirely out of office tape.

Two other standout pieces were "Release the Bats" and "Mendicant Bowl," done by Lauren Hemphill

and Sharon Grossman, respectively. Hemphill's work is a panoramic ink drawing of figures that slowly seem to transform into an old-fashioned carriage. Coming out of the carriage are actual strings, pinned to the wall, each with a three-dimensional bat on the end. The effect is amazing. Grossman's work is a ceramic mosaic bowl, set on top of two "carpets," one embroidered with beads reading "Gimme Gimme" and the other with Internet ads asking for money. The bowl itself has mosaic tiles on the outside, with sayings asking for money. The inside of the bowl is silver, and has small, striking handprints all over it. The piece, as a whole, is the most impressive and thematic in the gallery.

SIE 61 opened last Friday, Feb. 16 and will remain open until March 31. Admission is free to the public, and the Reinberger Galleries are located at 11141 East Boulevard, right down the street from the Peter B. Lewis Building. Gallery hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Saturday. If you find yourself bored during Community or Provost Hour, or you just have a little free time, go check out SIE 61. You won't be disappointed.

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