

Artists show serial thinking in still life show

By Tim Brouk
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Sports fans are familiar with the World Series, a series of at least four games played to determine Major League Baseball's coveted championship.

Artists are experts in series, too. Their subjects are sometimes a series of identical objects, or a number of pieces based on a similar theme or subject become a series. For an annual touring show, the group of still life painters known as Zeuxis depict the idea of series in painting.

"Often, artists work in series anyway, so we thought it was a good idea for us," said Phyllis Floyd, founder of Zeuxis.

Zeuxis' "Serial Thinking" consists of about 40 still lifes painted in oil and will be on display at Purdue University's Robert L. Ringel Gallery inside the Purdue Memorial Union beginning Monday through March 10.

Based in New York but with members scattered around New England and the Midwest, Zeuxis gets its name from ancient Roman writer Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*. The story involves a still life painting competition won by an artist named Zeuxis because his rendering of some grapes fooled birds that crashed into the canvas trying to pluck the fruit.

Purdue is the exhibit's last stop after spending time in galleries in Ohio, Illinois and New York City. In New York, the show stayed at the Kourou Gallery and received a favorable review in the *New York Times*.

Formal pieces

Purdue Galleries director Craig Martin believes this year's crop of Zeuxis paintings is strong and gets back to formal still lifes rather than social or political commentary that the group did last year with its show "The Human Presence."

Martin's favorite works are Floyd's two large pieces, *Ribbon Series #2* and *Ribbon Series #3*.

"They are somewhat simple but have dramatic, intense colors," Martin said. "There are common elements but a variation on a

FYI

"Serial Thinking" by the Zeuxis still life painters group opens Monday and runs through March 10 at Purdue University's Robert L. Ringel Gallery inside the Purdue Memorial Union. An opening reception will be held from 4:30 to 6 p.m. Thursday.

"The Still Life Project" also opens Monday and runs through March 1 at the Ralph G. Beelke Memorial Gallery inside Creative Arts Building Two.

theme. It kind of sums up the show probably the best and is one of the more dramatic images."

Floyd has captured the leathery leaves of a rubber plant and large, lidded glass jars where one is full of water. In both pieces, a beige ribbon snakes through the frame. The ribbons' shape and purpose are important to Floyd because it is a challenge to capture and offer texture much like tapestry does in other still lifes.

"It's a form as much as a piece of cloth or a ribbon," Floyd said. "It acts as a way to carry the eye from one thing to another."

Two Indiana University painting and drawing assistant professors are included in "Serial Thinking." Tim Kennedy and Eve Mansdorf joined Zeuxis in 1995 when they lived in New York and still create works for the group from Bloomington.

Inspired by an assignment he gave his two-dimensional design students about arranging and dividing composition, Kennedy created *Dichotomous Still Life with Mirror* and *Dichotomous Still Life with Geranium and T Square*. Both paintings have different items in the still life, but they were both created at the same time and the grouping of the objects are similar.

Mansdorf's *Flight from the Enchantress* was plucked from a series of still lifes that feature posters of 19th-century French painter Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres somehow included in the composition. In *Enchantress*, a

half-covered poster of one of Ingres' portraits stares at the viewer as a tapestry, chair and a table full of items are in front of her. Mansdorf admitted she and her near obsession with Ingres' art caused her to have trouble keeping the poster as merely part of the background and contributed to the title of the painting.

"It's the idea of something that seduces you and something you run away from at the same time," said Mansdorf, who also has *Doorknobs* in the show, a close-up detail of a pile of doorknobs that also make up a part of *Enchantress*.

'Still Life Project'

In the Ralph G. Beelke Memorial Gallery inside Creative Arts Building Two, "The Still Life Project" will also open Monday and run through March 1. When the show opens, the gallery's walls will be bare. It is up to students and area artists of any level to help fill them up.

Martin and the Purdue Galleries staff will assemble still lifes encased in glass cubes around the gallery. Martin said he will assemble a still life made up of objects from Purdue's permanent collection, an organic still life and a geometric one, and Purdue instructors will chip in the rest. Viewers are encouraged to use materials provided by the gallery or their own to draw, paint, photograph or sculpt the still lifes then hang their works of art on a wall.

Martin said the impromptu pieces will vary in size and will be hung "salon style."

"As soon as they finish them, they can go ahead and contribute them," Martin said. "I'd like to have works from floor to ceiling, almost overlapping. That could be a lot of fun. It might seem like a mess, but it would be a creative mess and give the kids something to look at — a bunch of drawings stuck around what they were created from."

Martin organized a similar exhibit when he was galleries director at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio.

"It's fun to put professional artists' stuff right next to third-graders," Martin said. "The kids get tickled to death that they can put their things up in the same



Photo provided
EVE MANSDORF'S *Flight from the Enchantress* was plucked from a series of still lifes that feature posters of 19th-century French painter Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres somehow included in the composition.

proximity. Plus, it's a learning experience for them to see how 'mature' or professional artists have responded to the same thing that they are looking at."

The project came together when Martin observed a retired Wright State drawing professor sketching

one of the pieces while a class of fifth-graders were trying their hand at it. By the end of the hour, the group of fifth-graders were gathered around and watched the retired artist's skills.

"He laughed and talked to them about drawing, and they asked him

questions," Martin said. "It made for a wonderful experience. If you tried to arrange for something like that it wouldn't, or it would seem forced."

"If we could get something like that to happen here, I would be thrilled."