

Annals of the ACA Alumni

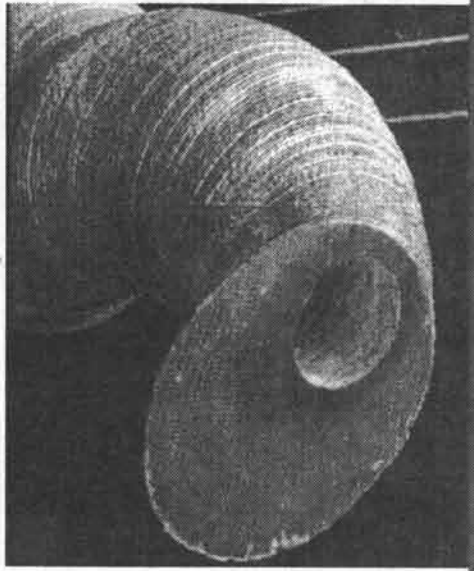
Sometimes it can be so liberating to visit a visual art show where no highly conceptual theme is imposed on the individual pieces but, instead, they are left to radiate the full breadth of their uniqueness. This is the effect of the 1999 Atlanta College of Art Juried Alumni Exhibit. Of course, it didn't hurt that the eclectic selection was in the honest hands of Tom Sokolowski, Director of the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, PA.

Speaking with me over the phone from the Warhol Museum, Sokolowski shared some of his ideas on contemporary art and his contributions to the ACA show. "It's always interesting to see what's out there. But in doing a show like this, you quickly dwindle down the good work to about 30 percent of the entries which would be pretty much the same that any other reviewer would pick. Quality just speaks. It's only when you're choosing a few that personal taste comes in."

Of the forty artists who submitted work, fourteen individual artists were chosen, as well as a collaborative pair. The question with contemporary art often revolves around how to teach it. Sokolowski has found that most schools go to either one extreme or another: "Most places teach traditional techniques, or else you get the swank art schools that are all theoretical critique. Warhol was actually one of the founding directors and major funders of the New York Academy, which is a very traditional art school. But his idea was 'know those rules so you can break them.' Basically, they should be a means to an end."

Receiving an honorable mention for his series of untitled photographs, Eddy Anthony's works require extreme attentiveness to their profound details. Each beautifully framed photograph tells a story in gentle scrimps of shades and hues. One image integrates a woman's face and hair into the branches of a tree, playing with notions of dreams and allegory, reminiscent of the myth of Apollo and Daphne. Another photograph lightly superimposes a man's face onto the facade of a brick wall. Proportions distorted and structures seeming to crumble, the almost unnoticeable rope that hauntingly dangles from one corner insinuates how far the viewer is from knowing the many secrets within the frame.

Almost wearing his heart on his sleeve (or on library card pockets), William E. Downs, III has arranged "137 Drawings, but no one to send them to," which also received an honorable mention. As my neck stretched and my head tilted to study each of the tiny sketches, perfectly pinned into a rectangular spread



"Self Portrait: Division and Divergence from Father" (cardboard, wax and graphite) by Nicholas Fraser, 1997-99

across the wall, I found myself laughing and nearly crying out loud. From his personified bicycle to his purple shorts, Downs describes the simplicity of moments in every day life that together form the story of who we are.

I was also quickly absorbed by the intense intimacy of Nicholas Fraser's sculptures, assertively assuming their own merited site in the 3,850 square-foot gallery. Although formal and abstract, the pieces are personally welcoming because of their textural roughness, natural tones, and inherent organic life. It is almost impossible to imagine Fraser working in two-dimensional art, since his longingness to physically and emotionally connect with the viewer is so strong. This affinity imbues the circular pieces with an eagerness to propel themselves into motion.

Also immediately engaging is the series of "Sacred Spaces" created by Andree Paerels which won second place. Suspended heavily at eye-level, these c-prints framed within plexiglass and steel were almost impossible to remove my eyes from. The slightly blurred images of a young figure amidst primitive, ritual seemed to fly from one side of the thin plate to the other. I found myself eventually circling around the installation, never fast enough to glimpse the mutation, but fully sensing the fiery emotions emitted by each colorful gesture.

Sokolowski noted that, "Given the range of the ACA's disciplines and faculties, there was a wide range of work." He explained that Andy Warhol was primarily concerned with the notion of engaging the audience. "A unique voice stands out because of it's compelling sense of communicating, enriching, and staying with me." Artists who are open to new ideas, according to Sokolowski, are part of the organic process of art. "There's nothing new, but an artist whose been influenced by a piece or another artist and can find a new way of expressing that can create great art."

The Atlanta College of Art 1999 Juried Alumni Exhibition will be on display through Aug. 22 in the Atlanta College of Art Gallery, in the Woodruff Arts Center, 1280 Peachtree St., NE (404) 733-5050. Gallery hours are Tues.-Sat. from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sun. from 12-5 p.m.

visual art