Four the love of art: BFA works on display

By CHRIS COOK

Figurative works with social commentary, post-photographic art, interactive tours and an idea machine make up this year's Bachelor of Fine Arts Thesis show. The eclectic collection of unbridled creativity is showing at the Lied Center Gallery in the Lied Education Center for the Arts.

Arts & Sciences seniors Rachel Bennett, Michael Mayer, Heather Burk and Peter Walsh held their opening last Saturday.

“The show went well,” Walsh said. “Attendance was pretty good.”

Bennett completed a series of oil paintings, chalk pastels, conte crayons and print making pieces for her thesis, titled “Dichotomies: Figurative Painting.” The paintings and pastels explode with color, displaying a balance of symbolism and technique.

Bennett's art, which often features human faces, explores the challenges humans face in the form of societal ideals and expectations. She employs themes regarding gender roles, conformity, flaws and individuality.

In her artist's statement, Bennett said, “The main theme of my work is the transcendence of stereotypical barriers. Liberation from these expectations can be a freeing experience.”

Mayer, whose thesis work is titled “The Process: Photographic New Media,” completed 11 prints that represent his creative process.

Mayer wrote in his artist's statement, “Starting with the initial inertia of the beginning, the idea is taken through failure, loss, and ultimately rebuilding and success. I believe that art can be a vehicle for a spiritual and intellectual transportation, which is what you see being built, literally, in the photographs.”

In “Off the Beaten Path: Graphic Design,” Burk lets viewers take their own ride on an interactive, virtual tour of downtown Omaha and the area surrounding Creighton.

Through a collection of photographs and some expert programming, viewers can click on areas in each picture, taking them to other areas of the virtual tour. “Off the Beaten Path” can be viewed in the gallery and also can be ordered on CD-ROM.

Walsh's thesis work is called “Self in Story: Photographic Sculpture in Installation.”

Walsh's statement about his work said, “Whether conversing, watching, or building relationships, I'm fascinated by the idiosyncrasies and contradictions of our interactions with one another. Because of the complexity of these moments I'm driven to create work with a story.”

Walsh's story is complete with a narrator and a large self-portrait in acrylic on canvas, along with a protagonist, conflict and a resolution. Through story, Walsh explores motivation, injustice, domesticity and inspiration. The installation even features an idea machine, whereby thoughts are synthesized into tangible objects — in this case, chocolate chip cookies.

The four artists were happy with the high attendance and that their works were well received.

“Things were a little crazy prior to 6 p.m. After six, it went well. Reception to the work seemed good and there was a constant flow of people all night,” Mayer said.

The BFA Thesis Exhibit 2004 will be open for viewing in the Lied Art Gallery until Sunday, May 16, from noon - 4 p.m. daily.