Guthrie's icons layer Lied with detail

By MICK FORGEY
Scene Editor

The new gallery show by Associate Professor of Journalism and Mass Communications Tim Guthrie cannot be summed in a single phrase like "sculpture" or "video." The show, "RE: Visitations [Part V - In Multiples]," has about 710 pieces, for crying out loud.

What I can tell you about the gallery in the Lied Education Center for the Arts, and what Guthrie told me, is that you will get out of it what you put in. It should not be a surprise that Guthrie, who teaches graphic design and visual communications, has produced an exhibit that emphasizes content, which dictates unique design and is enhanced by audience interaction.

Guthrie's gallery pieces do not adhere to a particular medium. He incorporates ceramics, digital imagery and personal relics into his massive collection of icons, shrines and altar pieces, which feature biographical information, random life moments and...eh, never mind, they can't be summed up. Summing up only works when dealing with two-digit figures.

The gallery feels like a collection of personal snapshots, borrowed from people's brains and attics, alike. Guthrie achieves this effect with "Wall of Icons," a collection of about 650 5-by-8 inch icons, digital images of personal and vintage photos, framed in etched clay with a wooden texture.

A signature element of each piece is the inclusion of a personal item sealed in resin at the bottom of the icon like a fossil. Guthrie's recruited subjects provide their own personal items for the icons, which include everything from syringes to toy monkeys. Many have surprising content. For instance, one icon features a digitally retouched photo of a soldier looking through the Berlin Wall; an actual piece of the wall is sealed inside the icon's lower half.

Guthrie uses the format of icons, shrines and altar pieces to imply a level of significance that encourages viewers to give the items a second look.

"Devotional imagery serves functions that can be summarized in three words: instruction, veneration and remembrance, all of which are important to my work," Guthrie said. "This format serves as biography, time capsule and reliquary, where the ultimate goal is to pay homage to the subject."

Beyond that approach, there is no overarching story or theme linking the pieces. Trust me — I asked. The idea is that gallery visitors view each multilayered piece to the extent that they wish.

"Some of the portraits additionally become interactive exploratory biographies about the subjects, in addition to static visual interpretations of them," Guthrie said.

Ideas of veneration and interactivity are evident in the gallery altarpieces. "The Fall of Fredric/arus" is one such piece. Shaped like a refrigerator, the altar opens up to reveal homage to a beloved Nevada high school teacher named Fredric Colip, who died in a skydiving accident. After extensive interviews with family and friends, Guthrie constructed the piece. It features a cast of Colip's actual refrigerator magnets, digitally imposed letters between Colip and his wife, and cake-baking items, one of Colip's favorite pastimes.

Numerous other relics and personal info can be discovered upon further examination of the altarpieces, especially with "Dwelling and Recall," a dollhouse-like structure that hides a great deal in its movable drawers.

"The more time spent with these pieces, the more personal and rewarding is the information that is eventually discovered," Guthrie said.

In addition to the icons and altarpieces, Guthrie's gallery also includes a 100-piece set entitled "Cast a Collective Blind Eye (w/Canary)." Another form of mixed media, Guthrie combines digital images with encaustics, a wax layer mixed with paint, to create a series of portraits. The portraits' subjects include Creighton faculty and students, with one or two other newsworthy individuals.

For a deeper understanding of Guthrie's construction and thought process, check out the fully interactive kiosk on the second floor of the Skutt Student Center. It features Guthrie's commentary, slides of the intricate construction of the icons and altarpieces, and provides clues for those interested in some of the works' meanings.

The gallery, "RE: Visitations [Part V - In Multiples]," is open through Saturday, March 4, in the Lied Center. Hours are 1 to 4 p.m. daily. A reception for Guthrie will be held Wednesday, Feb. 9, from 6 to 9 p.m.

Tim Guthrie
RE: Visitations
(Part V - In Multiples)

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