'A-mazing' exhibit starts program of Fine Arts Gallery artistic shows

Earthworker James Pierce's exhibit of photos and slides showing his work at Pratt Farm in central Maine, featuring the Pratt Farm Turf Maze, opened the Creighton Fine Arts Gallery program for 1976-1977 last Wednesday.

The opening, followed by a wine and cheese party with artist Pierce in residence, was the first of 10 scheduled at three-week intervals throughout the year, according to Bidez Embry Moore of the Fine Arts Department.

Opening with Pierce was local silversmith Robert Chenoweth who displayed his handmade jewelry.

A SIX-FOOT replica in green masking tape of the Pratt Farm maze on the floor of the Gallery is the exhibit's highlight. Pierce accompanied the slide show with an explanation of his work.

Included on Pratt Farm, a Pierce family owned homestead on the eastern shore of the Kennebec River, are a group of earthworks, including: a triangular redoubt, a circular redoubt, and a burial mound, besides the maze.

The maze forms an equilateral triangle measuring 120 feet on each side. The borders are dug to a depth of one foot while the raised paths are two feet wide and are about one third of a mile in length.

IN A STATEMENT about the maze, Pierce said: "The maze is an allegory of time and life, life as a game with many choices but a single goal, or simply life as a journey, a journey which may begin with searching sperm from insemination to birth, toward the center and out again.

"The maze is a womb, but it is also a Hellmouth, a paradise garden, a wilderness, tapis vert, mandorla, sundial, a leaf-and-snow collector, a star-pointer by night and a cloudcatcher by day. It is a still point in a world of change.

"THE MAZE IS a time machine. It is a Cretan Labyrinth and those who enter become Theseus seeking the Minotaur.

Pierce said that while the Pratt Farm turf maze is possibly the only maze of its kind cut in the New World, its origins are very ancient and European.

He cited mazes built from the Greek Golden Age to British works of the 15th Century as evidence of its antiquity.

THE ECONOMIC and environmental aspects of earth sculpture attracted Pierce. He said the basic tool of his trade, the shovel, "lasts a long time and only costs about $8." Later he added a wheelbarrow for one of his larger works.

Immortality through art, one of Pierce's major concerns, is best satisfied by earth works although Pierce disavowed any interest in gaining a personal immortality through his works.

The Pratt Farm exhibit will run through Sept. 29th when sculptor Bob Hower and photographer Ron Geibert will open their displays.