

Campus exhibit showcases diverse talents of alumni artists

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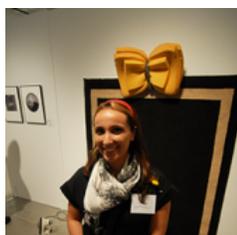
Art department graduates from the past four decades returned to campus on October 1 for a special reception honoring the artists whose works were accepted into TCNJ Art Gallery's show first show of the academic year, TCNJ Art Alumni Exhibit 2010. The multifaceted show, which concluded in mid-October, had something to satisfy nearly every art lover's tastes, from traditionalist offerings such as paintings, prints, and photos, to commercial advertising and Web sites, to more avant-garde fare.



Michael Pyrdsa '75 next to his painting, "Golden Fields"

The show was the first juried exhibition of works by alumni artists, Gallery Director **Sarah Cunningham** said. Art department graduates received invitations this past summer asking them to submit works for consideration. In response, the show's organizers received 435 submissions from 75 alumni, Cunningham said. It was up to exhibit juror Dan Cameron, founder and artistic director of U.S. Biennial, Inc. and director of visual arts for the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans, to select which submissions made the show. The result was an eclectic assortment of 57 works from 35 artists who graduated as early as 1972 and as recently as last year.

One alumnus whose work was included in the show and who was in attendance that evening was **Michael Pyrdsa '75**. He said he transferred to the College in 1972 and, having grown up with an interest in drawing, figured pursuing a career in art was "a logical path to follow." It seems to have been the right path too, as he's been working as a painter for more than 30 years now. Although much of his work over the years has been oil on canvas—including *Golden Fields*, which was part of the exhibit—Pyrdsa said he actually spent a good deal of his undergraduate days in the art department's pottery room in Holman Hall ("which at the time was the 'new' art building," he explained).





Jen Keshka '07
stands in front of
"untitled rug (for
the girl in the
mirror)"

Also in attendance that evening was **Jen Keshka '07**, who had two works on display: *untitled video* and *untitled rug (for the girl in the mirror)*. Both were borne "out of confusion and frustration as to what I should be doing in the studio," said Keshka.

"When I first got to grad school I was not used to having a 'studio' proper and just felt really strange about the space," Keshka explained. She decided to document her struggles using her laptop's Web cam. One of those works, *untitled video*, plays like a portrait of the young artist deconstructing her self-portrait. The video begins in reverse, playing at a faster-than-normal speed. Keshka described the action thusly: "large gestural strokes uncover a line drawing—the movements much resembling an archeological dig." The image that is uncovered is an earlier work of hers—*what are little girls made of (birdgirl, self-portrait)*, an ink sketch that she had repainted at life size onto the wall. "The video then plays frontwards, then backwards again, and so on. It reveals a constant process of revealing and covering up."

Keshka said that she mostly enjoys working with materials that are not usually associated with art. "Think cake, domestic household objects, Pepto-Bismol—these materials hold certain definitions, qualities, or essences that I like to build upon, breakdown, or otherwise explore," she said. In *untitled rug (for the girl in the mirror)*, she used objects that happened to be lying around her studio: the rug from her freshman dorm room, an iron that had left a burn mark on the rug, and a foam bow she had created previously.

"The objects...have very personal histories for me," she explained.



Matt Gabe '05 with his
"Hoyle" packaging

Keshka explained that she left graduate school because she didn't feel it wasn't a good fit for her. She's hoping to find work as an art teacher, and is in the process of applying for Teach for America. Her goal, once she starts teaching, will be "to lead students in the direction of innovation, reinvention, and progress through art," she said.

Matt Gabe '05 traveled all the way from California for the October 1 event (as well as to visit family and friends and celebrate his birthday four days later). Gabe's contribution to the exhibit was product packaging he designed for *Hoyle Gaming Suite 2010*, a popular computer software title from Encore Software. The graphic design graduate said he doesn't traditionally exhibit his work in juried shows, but decided to enter this one after his Hoyle design won an award in the 2010 American Package Design Awards, a contest held by *GD USA* (Graphic Design USA) Magazine.

Gabe said he no longer works at Encore, but during his time there he designed packaging for a slew of popular software titles including *JEOPARDY!*, *Wheel of Fortune*, *DinerDash*, *FATE*, and *The Oregon Trail*. "Telling people that I got to make a package for *The Oregon Trail* is pretty cool," he conceded.

These days, he is the art director for Mattel's Hot Wheels brand, and works on the Color Shifters, Custom Motors, and Monster Jam segments. "I would have loved to have gotten some Hot Wheels products into show, but all of the packages that I've been working on won't be on shelf until November," he said.



Avani (Patel)
Palkhiwala '01
and her "RPS
Arcade"

In addition to graphic design work, Gabe said he also enjoys photography. "It's more of a hobby and less about artistic expression," he explained, but added that some of his photos were exhibited in the "Art Attack!" art show hosted by the Boys, Girls, and Games group at Mattel.

Another alumna on hand that evening was **Avani (Patel) Palkhiwala '01**, whose RPS Arcade offered a modern take on the game of Rock, Paper, Scissors. The fine arts and computer science graduate, who is now an adjunct in TCNJ's Interactive Multimedia (IMM) program, says she loves designing and programming games as well as sewing. "This project was a combination of various media I've worked in," she said.

"In the past five years, I've gravitated toward embedding sensors and chips in physical pieces to entice the user to touch and interact with the 'art,' which can respond," said Palkhiwala. Her work is "inspired by the exhibits you see at museums like the Liberty Science Center, where the exhibition can only be experienced by putting your hands on it."

When she is not teaching or creating art, Palkhiwala works as consultant for a variety of companies, with a focus on the creation and delivery of educational content and game

production for the Web. Her first professional Web site project, RutgerScience, was honored with a Webby Award.

The festivities on October 1 also included a dedication ceremony for the Art and Interactive Multimedia Building, **which opened earlier this year.**

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