

Sculpting works of art

Intermediate sculpture class creates work for campus display

By EMILY BREWER
PERSPECTIVES EDITOR

Who says that art must be limited to the confines of a stuffy museum or the walls of a hidden art gallery? In the spirit of the Year of the Arts, the Intermediate Sculpture class went public this semester. That is, it renamed the class Public Art and worked to do just that — create sculptures for on-campus displays. The title, Public Art, reflects the class's interest in sharing their art with the campus community. "The emphasis in this class was on a more interactive style of art that gets out of buildings and off the walls, sharing in the space occupied by the people in the community," said junior Julie Davis, a student in the class.

What is public art?

The idea of public art is not new to the campus. Remember the chain sculptures created by university alumnus Will Garin, '95, last year? According to Davis, public art, as used by the class, does not have to be either a traditional Greco-Roman marble statue or an abstract metal creation like the *Timaeus Pentagon* in front of Scales Fine Arts Center. Public art does not have to be permanent, or even material, in the broadest definition. It can be practical or beautiful or both, Davis said. Through their preliminary temporary projects, the class explored these concepts, as individual students tried sculpting with leaves, flowers, discarded mail, ice, and broken glass, among other objects.

Learning the politics

For the members of the intermediate sculpture class, the idea of making works of art for the university community was both exciting and daunting, Davis said. Putting up works of art for all the world to view is not as easy as one might think — a certain amount of politics is involved. According to David Finn, a visiting assistant professor of art who teaches the sculpture class, the tangled process of even getting the projects of the 14-member class approved was not easy. "John Anderson (the vice president for finance and administration), Lu Leake (an associate vice-president), Jim Coffey (the

grounds supervisor) and myself formed a committee to review proposals for the project," Finn said. "It was sort of an *ad hoc* committee."

It was important to get a perspective outside of the art department before putting the projects up, Leake said. Each project had to meet approval before going up. Although most projects were approved, two were considered inappropriate and had to be reconsidered.

A work by sophomore Marcellus Wilson was vetoed from the onset. The piece was deemed inappropriate because of its use of wine bottles. While Wilson's interpretation of the piece was not intended

Joanna Iwata liked the idea of having a message center, the committee thought that the possibility for negative comments being written on the pyramid was too great. They asked Rainwater to place it in a different location, which didn't work out.

There are a number of things to consider before putting up the art. "It's not just a matter of making something and sticking it where you want; there's a lot involved," Finn said.

However, Leake said that she and Coffey would approve any piece that was "safe, and do-able, and appropriate" to campus appearance. Coffey said he considered the aesthetics and taste of a piece, as well as its ability to fit into an appropriate space, when making his decisions as to whether or not a certain work would be allowed.

Leake also emphasized the need to contact the people who work in buildings near where a piece would be placed to ensure their acceptance of it. It was also important to contact the fire inspector or other appropriate person if there were any questions of safety. "Artists who display their art must consider public opinion because they are using communal space and community reaction to their work is important. What if people don't like it?" Finn asked.

Students in the class prepared themselves for the possible reaction to their pieces through role-playing and stopping to consider other people's outlooks. "Artists who display their art must consider public opinion because they are using communal space and community reaction to their work is important. What if people don't like it?" Finn asked.

Using the imagination

After looking at the politics of public art and the different things to consider in forming their projects, Finn encouraged the class to use their imaginations before beginning their projects.

In preparation, the class discussed slides of prominent artwork and readings on public artists and the problems they face.

"I took the class off campus to look at other works of public art to give them an idea of what they needed to do," Finn said.

The class went to the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art to look at the public art there. Finn wanted to inspire the students through example.

"I showed them examples and I challenged them to describe the aesthetics of everyday objects," Finn said.

"Often we look at things in terms of their practicality and not in terms of their beauty," he said.

Finally, they came up with some initial ideas, and they began the arduous process of turning brainstorming into art.

"To assist us in the process of bringing their thoughts to life in a public way, the class did a preliminary public project, based loosely on our ideas for the final project," Davis said.

The preliminary works were simple, unfinished works that were only up for a few hours, used to give the class some exposure with the challenges involved in working in public.

"We learned how people react to foreign things in their space, which is one of the most important components of public art," Davis said. The class discovered that although the work may be important to them, it may offend others.

Taking ideas from the imagination to reality

"After the approval process was completed, work commenced on creating the artworks, for some of us at least. One exception was a group of three students, seniors Mary Leigh Cherry and Lash Briggs and junior Kevin Palme, who decided to work with Coffey to create a new look for the breezeway between the two sections of Scales Fine Arts Center," Davis said.

The three students made a model of a redesigned breezeway; a budget had already been set up for improvement, hoping to make it a more comfortable and accessible place for people to congregate and study outdoors.

Their plan was to place planters and several more benches, chairs and tables in the area.

Although most of the artwork is

"The title, *Public Art*, reflects the class' interest in sharing their art with the campus community."

Julie Davis
Junior

popping up around campus this week, other pieces may not be up until later this semester or early next semester. Finn said that the projects will be up through the spring semester, so if students do not get a chance to see them now, there is still time.

Senior Mary Alice Manning's piece has several parts which will be distributed across campus. She has installed swings in at least 10 trees. These swings are made of rope and cedar, with words wood burned into the seats. There are already four swings out on Davis Field and the public is invited to try them out.

"The words pertain to thoughts one might have about age, transition, responsibility, freedom, and play," Manning said. University arborist Wayne Cameron assisted her in her project. Manning's idea stemmed from her observations about the contrast between the stressful college experience and the carefree existence of a child on a swing.

Senior Tom Green's sculpture, *Apocalypse Pending*, can be found in one of the secluded courtyards on the Gulley Drive side of Tribble Hall.

"I am attempting to encourage a contemplative atmosphere by rearranging the space around a sculpture," Green said. The piece consists of a tall square pyramidal base with a flat top, above which hangs an inverted cone. Steam will rise from the top of the pyramid, and the entire sculpture will be illuminated.

"The object above the pyramid serves as a reminder of the impending threat of the end of history. If the cord is cut, the steam will cease to be released and the pyramid will be sealed," Green said.

Green said he hopes that his work will eventually become a permanent part of the courtyard outside of Tribble.

Senior Rebecca Blevins created a large metal sculpture of a double helix. Located outside of the biology building, Winston Hall, it is a good example of a site-specific work because it resembles DNA.

Walking out onto Perritt Plaza, you can see junior Rudy Shepherd's unique sculpture using red and white flowers to help heighten awareness of the AIDS epidemic. His project will disappear when the flowers die, but the shape of a red ribbon, a symbol for AIDS awareness, stands out and is rather powerful.

Other pieces that will be around campus include the following: *High* by Adam Rainwater, placed in front of Z. Smith Reynolds Library; *7 Esoteric Steps* by sophomore Russell Scott, found outside Scales; senior Crystal Thomas' *Subverted Flower* in the courtyard of Student

Apartments; junior Ted Arditti's *The Instrument* in the Scales breezeway; and Marcellus Wilson's *Post 'n Chains*, is in its temporary location behind Scales.

Senior Terry Tracey's untitled work is made of several components around campus; and Davis' piece, *This Land Is Your Land, This Land Is My Land...*, is in Benson.

Projects like these don't just appear. The students in the class devoted time to planning, organizing and creating. But the projects will continue to require maintenance through next spring. Furthermore, Finn said, the students in the sculpture class each paid about \$100 out of pocket for materials for the art works.

"The works are expensive to make and expensive to maintain," Finn said.

"I'm very pleased with the works and look forward to seeing for a semester," he said. Finn concedes, however, that the class could not have done it alone.

Future of public art display on campus

As for the future of public artworks on campus, not much is certain except that more will appear.

"As we make more interactive places on campus (with new construction projects) there's definitely going to be more room for outdoor public sculpture," Coffey said.

Junior Farrah Moore, the co-chairwoman of the Student Government physical planning committee, is optimistic about the future.

According to Moore, SG has recognized the desire of the student body for more artwork on campus, and plans to support efforts in this area.

Anderson has agreed to acquire one sculpture a year, she said, and SG will encourage the purchase of any of the sculptures from the class that it would like to have made permanent.

Finn said that with the recent spotlight on the arts, the timing of this display is particularly appropriate, and maybe it will pave the way for more public art on campus.

Both Moore and Coffey said that the people in charge of the quintennial Student Union art buying trip to New York might have crucial roles in bringing public art to campus.

Leake said she believes that the future of public sculpture will be decided in a large part by the reception of these student projects, whether it be graffiti or positive



Senior Rebecca Blevins prepares her piece, *Double Helix*, located in front of Winston Hall.

Courtesy of Julie Davis

to portray drinking in a positive light, the committee felt that in light of recent events, the piece's ambiguity might be offensive to some people.

Junior Lothar Rainwater's idea met a similar fate. He had wanted to make a large pyramidal structure and attach paint and brushes to it, so that it would serve as a message center for students. He wanted to place it on the patio outside the Benson University Center. Although Benson Center director

commentary. Finn said that he would like feedback on the artworks and plans to set up a forum next semester to gather opinion and reaction.

He also said that they are setting up a website next semester through the art department.

As for the Public Art class itself, Finn said that before he came to the university last year, he had offered the class at other schools.

This semester marked the first time it had ever been offered here, though he hopes to offer it every year from now on.

"Each of the students had been through a beginning sculpture course," Finn said of the 14 students in the intermediate sculpture class.

"The idea of this class is to be more ambitious. Everybody challenged themselves," Finn said.

If you would like to respond to the art, please e-mail David Finn at finndt@wfu.edu, or e-mail any of the individual student artists with your comments.



Junior Rudy Shepherd places flowers in his work, *Redemption*.

Carlton Ward

Student sculptors and their campus art

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|---|---|
| Ted Arditti
<i>The Instrument</i>
Scales breezeway | Lothar Rainwater
<i>High</i>
In front of library |
| Rebecca Blevins
<i>Double Helix</i>
Front of Winston Hall | Russell Scott
<i>7 Esoteric Steps</i>
Near Scales Fine Art Center |
| Lash Briggs
Mary Leigh Cherry
Kevin Palme
Model of a re-designed breezeway for Scales Fine Art Center
Displayed in Scales lobby.
Design to go into effect later | Rudy Shepherd
<i>Reincarnation</i>
Perritt Plaza |
| Julie J. Davis
<i>This Land is Your Land, this Land is My Land...</i>
Benson University Center lobby and outside steam column | Crystal L. Thomas
<i>Subverted Flower</i>
North Residence Hall |
| Tom Green
<i>Apocalypse Pending</i>
Small courtyard in Tribble Hall | Terry Tracey
<i>Untitled</i>
In four wooded locations |
| Mary Alice Manning
<i>Swings</i>
15 swings located throughout campus | Marcellus Wilson
<i>Post 'n Chains</i>
Behind Scales, to be moved to Magnolia Court after construction |

All works will be up now and through the spring semester

Courtesy of David Finn



Junior Ted Arditti welds in the sculpture studio in Scales Fine Arts Center. His sculpture, *The Instrument*, is located in the breezeway.

Courtesy of Mary Alice Manning