

NewsBank Article Listing

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The fine art of emotion

Feelings spring from artist's heart, race to the mind, course through a paintbrush and voila - art!

By CHRISTINE RICCELLI

Special to The Register

Frank Hansen doesn't think when he paints. He emotes.

"I paint what I feel," said the Des Moines artist, whose current exhibit at Moberg Gallery, "Practice Makes Better," runs through Oct. 14. "It's straight from the gut."

Raw emotion leaps from Hansen's canvases. His acrylic paintings and mixed-media works bulge with bold colors and textures, conveying an intensely felt, in-your-face attitude that's impossible to ignore.

The graffiti-like written text on some of the art adds to the effect.

"I'm expressing myself and what I see as the truth, whether it's how I feel about a political issue or a personal experience," said the 37-year-old Hansen.

His vigorous style recalls Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988), the 1980s New York art star. Basquiat gained international fame as a neo-expressionist whose gritty works often depicted black urban experience.

In retrospect, said Hansen, he can see how some of his art can bring Basquiat to mind, as well as American pop artist Robert Rauschenberg.

But those artists didn't serve as inspirations, he said. Comparisons to those artists' work "make me feel justified rather than inspired," he said.

He doesn't want to be labeled the same as other artists or linked to any particular art movement.

"I call what I do emotionalism," he said. "It's spontaneous. Formal composition is secondary."

The exhibit's 59 new works cover a range of both thought-provoking and playful subjects.

Viewers will see pieces portraying a monkey in banana cream sauce, Hansen's mother's kidney stone and a tribute to the Beastie Boys next to works indicting the Iraq war, suburban sprawl, the news media and the skinhead culture.

"I jump back and forth between serious and goofy," Hansen said. "I'm never sure how the piece will come out. It depends on my mood."

Some of the exhibit's most compelling works deal with political issues.

The haunting "Kill 'Em All, Let Bush Sort 'Em Out," for example, depicts a shell-shocked soldier with free-floating heads swirling around him and a doomsday clock ticking inside his head.

Another evocative piece effectively uses blood-red and white paint in an almost garish way to show the head of a distraught George Washington, accompanied by the words "I cannot tell a lie ... hang on America."

Odd and often amusing characters populate other paintings.

In "Confidence," a wannabe sophisticate with a shaved head smokes a cigarette while balancing four other cigarettes and a drink in his hand.

"Simple Sara" uses a rough-drawn style to portray a pigtailed girl-woman in a striped yellow dress who's pondering whether she has just traded her life savings for a few magic beans or bird eggs.

Hansen also explores childhood memories and his friends' lives in his work. The mixed-media work "Gee Tar" reflects Hansen's thwarted dreams to become the next Eddie van Halen.

"Blueprint" shows two friends who fell in love the first time they met, while "The Desperate Space Between" is about two mismatched friends whose

marriage was never meant to be.

Each work has a story behind it, Hansen said.

"It could even just be an inside joke that only I get," he said. "Or I'll get a title in my mind and I'll start painting from there."

The art is painted on plywood and edged with a box frame. Hansen, who works as a plumber during the day, often retrieves the plywood from Dumpsters at work sites.

In his mixed-media works, he also uses screens and other every-day materials that otherwise would land in the trash bin.

"There's so much waste," said Hansen. "I bring it home and make use of it."

His high-energy style attracts a more varied audience than other types of art, said Jackie Moberg, owner of the gallery, which also hosted an exhibit of Hansen's work in 2005.

"Frank has art appreciators ranging from college students to older sophisticated art buyers," she said. "His work is contagious - people often buy more of his art after they purchase the first piece."

The exhibit also includes a film about the artist, which can be viewed by request. Made by Iowa native and artist Mark Kneeskern, it focuses on Hansen's creative process.

The work reveals an edginess more commonly found in art hubs like New York and Los Angeles. But Hansen, who grew up on a farm near Bondurant, has no desire to leave Iowa for more glittery environs.

"Here, people aren't as over-exposed to everything" so it's easier to make an impact, said Hansen, who lives with his artist wife, Holly, on Des Moines' east side.

"I'd be less of an artist if I were in New York City," he said. "I'm here to stay."

Christine Riccelli is a freelance writer who lives in Des Moines.

DETAILS

WHAT: "Practice Makes Better," an exhibit by Frank Hansen

WHEN: Through Oct. 14

WHERE: Moberg Gallery, 2921 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines

INFO: 279-9191; www.moberggallery.com

BACKGROUND: Frank Hansen grew up near Bondurant and earned a bachelor's degree in fine art from Grand View College. His work has appeared at the Iowa State Fair for the past 12 years, as well as in galleries, restaurants and coffeehouses throughout central Iowa. He and his wife, Holly, live in Des Moines.

Photos_By: SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

Frank Hansen calls his style "emotionalism." Formal composition is secondary to spontaneity. He explores everything from childhood memories to politics."Simple Sara," by Frank Hansen"The Desperate Space Between"

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