Neiman Center Masters the Craft of Teaching

By Donna Cornachio

Visiting artists at the center have included Neiman himself (one of the most popular living artists in America, best known for his brilliantly colored, energetic images of sporting events), Elliott Green, William Kentridge, Alexis Rockman and Kara Walker.

Kiki Smith was one of the center’s first visiting artists in 1998 and has returned several times since. One notable result was the photogravure Tidal, a panel of 15 full moons and their upside-down reflections in the ocean’s waves, as if seen from the moon’s perspective. Smith arranged to have the moon photographed taken from Columbia’s Rutherford Observatory. The work, one edition of which is on view at the Neiman Center, was also bought by MoMA.

The center keeps the remainder of the art for 70 years; in return they receive nearly half the editions for 25 years. The work, or the right to publish the work, belongs to them forever. The prints are then distributed among the students, usually free of charge.

“Being able to work with the artists and watch those steps unfold before you is such a special thing,” says Sarah Pool, who has been a visiting artist at the center since 1995. “It’s a pleasure for the students as well. Paula Wilson, who graduated in 2005, was studying print at the Neiman Center while Kara Walker was in residency. Being able to work with the artists and watch those steps unfold before you is such a special thing,” Wilson says. She, after she graduated, Wilson worked as an associate in Walker’s studio.

As a student, you’re given an opportunity to do projects on your own as well as to work with blue-chip and emerging artists,” adds Megan Foster, an alumna of the Neiman Print Center who graduated in 2002 and is now a master printer. “That hands-on experience and those connections you make are invaluable.”

Sarah Sue, a current visiting artist at the center, is working on a print construction of ladders, balconies and fire escapes made out of archival loose-leaf notebooks. “My idea was to question the very nature of a print,” she says, “to stretch the boundaries with something that is printed matter and everyday and mundane, and to produce it as fine art.” The pads themselves are three-dimensional prints. Every pad is hand-printed, and even each line is hand-printed on archival paper. Some 30-odd editions of each construction are being made at the center, with most of the journeyman work done by the students.

The students “are phenomenal,” says Sue, who also teaches advanced printmaking with Kiki Smith. “They’re very innovative and technically very strong... A lot of their ideas are very abstract. The dialogue with them is great, too.

ON EXHIBIT: THE CHILDREN’S ART CARNIVAL

Social change is the theme of a new exhibit June 12 to 30 at the LeRoy Neiman Gallery in Dodge Hall. Change Starts With Me: 2 features paintings, collages, video and sculptures by students of The Children’s Art Carnival, a Hunter-based arts organization for at-risk and under-served youth. How students feel about themselves and the world, and their ideas for social change, are reflected in their artwork. Co-sponsored by Columbia’s office of government and community affairs, the exhibit’s opening reception will be held June 12 from 4:30 to 7:00 p.m.

KEEFER TO STEP DOWN

Elizabeth J. Keefer, the University’s general counsel since 1997, is stepping down to take a job at a Washington, D.C., consulting firm. A search is under way for her replacement at Columbia.

Keefer, known as Libby, is joining TMG Strategies, a strategic communications and management consulting firm that works with corporations, think tanks and the government on issues ranging from reputation challenges, class-action lawsuits, antitrust or patent disputes as well as employment, environmental and government issues.

In her nearly two years at Columbia, Keefer has been instrumental in a number of issues facing the University. She arrived just as the medical center was merging its Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital with Cornell’s New York Hospital to form NewYork-Presbyterian. Her office has also handled the University’s growth of its intellectual property and patent portfolio. More recently, Keefer has been a linchpin of the legal efforts regarding Columbia’s expansion into Manhattanville.

“Her advice is invaluable,” says the University’s general counsel, Saul Finkelstein. Keefer was deputy undersecretary of the Army for the Federal Trade Commission. She later worked at the U.S. Department of State, rising to deputy undersecretary of state for economic affairs. From 1989 to 1992, she was deputy undersecretary of the Army. She returned to private practice as a partner at Hughes Hubbard & Reed, from which she was recruited to join Columbia.

Keefer made news after graduating from Barnard College in 1973 by being hired as Columbia’s first woman assistant in its athletic department, where she was made director of the tennis club at Baker Field. According to a 1972 New York Times story about her job, headlineled “Columbia’s Tennis Looks Better with Libby Keefer on the Scene,” she was at the time doing pre-med work and was planning to become a veterinarian. Fortunately for Columbia, she changed her mind.

Elizabeth "Libby" Keefer most importantly we know her as our friend,” said Columbia President Lee C. Bollinger. “That makes this a sad and happy moment.”

Keefer will return to Washington, where she began her career in 1977 as a trial attorney for the Federal Trade Commission. She later worked at the U.S. Department of State, rising to deputy undersecretary of state for economic affairs. From 1989 to 1992, she was deputy undersecretary of the Army. She returned to private practice as a partner at Hughes Hubbard & Reed, from which she was recruited to join Columbia.

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