MFA Thesis Exhibition 2004 Offers Array of Styles and Media

BY ALISSA KAPLAN MICHAELS

Two dozen graduate students in the Visual Arts will share with the public the culmination of their two-year experience at Columbia when they take part in the MFA Thesis Exhibition 2004. At the exhibition, 25 students display their works, in a range of media including sculpture, painting, printmaking, photography, video and performance art.

"The projects are incredibly ambitious," said Ali Sabtostick, the show’s curator and co-founder of the Wrong Gallery in Chelsea. "Many of the works go beyond two-dimensional representation."

One such example is Mika Rottenberg’s "The Tropical Breeze Project" (2004), in which she finds women with extreme physical abilities and casts them in various scenarios. For this work, Rottenberg made an infomercial for her invented product, Tropical Breeze Tissues, featuring a factory in the back of a truck where tissues—made from lemon and drenched in the sweat of the bodybuilder who is driving—are packaged by a dancer.

Another highlight of the show is Noah Fischer’s "Empire Channel" (2004), for which he created a tower composed of archetypal political and social images hand-painted onto film and shown on four revolving lanterns that project onto a tent enclosure. Each lantern, illuminated at separate intervals, displays such images as George Bush’s face and black-and-white scenes from Times Square.

Anna Crashcroft mixes performance, sound, instruction and architecture in her large-scale installations that explore how interpersonal dynamics are manifested in the physical world. For her thesis project, she presents fragments of a fictional palatial mansion, built according to the extreme fantasies of its owners. The structure is in a continuous state of excavation and renovation, and each room is inspired by an autobiographical theme.

Viewers are invited to enter Rachel Poulion’s landscapes and place themselves in and around them. Large paper mounds, all made from paper or cast paper pulp, represent lava-coated volcanoes and mountains inspired by the Big Island of Hawaii. Sometimes, the lava forms recognizable, yet incongruous images, such as Buddha or Mount Rushmore. Poulion, who proposes a new way of engaging with landscape and perspective, places small objects among the structures to focus on how one’s view changes with distance.

Mounting such a show is not easy, said Jon Kesler, chair of the Visual Arts Division. "The students roll up their sleeves and build out the show, from lighting to sheetrock installation. It’s an enormous amount of work."

Kesler added that for the past four years the show has been in Harlem venues. "We are proud to continue this tradition by again having the exhibition in the Studebaker Building," he said.

Julia Vicinus, development and alumni relations officer for the School of the Arts, said, "This is a great opportunity for galleries to get the hot new artist.” She said that Columbia’s Visual Arts Division is enjoying a high profile; there currently are about 10 shows in New York City featuring work by Columbia alumni and faculty.

The opening of the MFA Thesis Exhibition 2004 is from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., May 2, at the Studebaker Building, 615 W. 13th St., 5th floor (just west of Broadway). The show takes place May 2-23. Except for opening day, hours are noon to 6 p.m., Wednesdays through Sundays. Admission is free.

Day of Remembrance

It was the annual Commemoration Service at St. Paul’s Chapel, on April 22, Columbia remembered the more than 2,600 faculty, staff and alumni who died in 2003. It was an afternoon of orchestral music, hymns and readings from the Koran and Old Testament. Rabbi Charles Sheer, of Columbia/Barnard Hillel, gave the memorial address, President Lee C. Bollinger offered the University tribute, and University chaplain Jewelnel Davis ended the service by leading a moment of silence. Below, John T. Truman, professor of clinical pediatrics, plays a traditional Scottish lament.

Five Elected to National Academy of Sciences

Five Columbia University professors were recently elected to the prestigious National Academy of Sciences. Their election, in recognition of their distinguished and continuing achievements in original research, is considered one of the highest honors that can be accorded a United States scientist or engineer.

Forty Columbia faculty members are currently members of the academy. The following professors have joined them:

Louis E. Brus, Thomas A. Edison Professor of Chemical Engineering, is one of the founders of a new branch of solid state physics and chemistry: inorganic nanomaterials. He pioneered the study of physical, electronic and chemical properties of semiconductor nanocrystals as a function of their size.

Martin Chalfie, William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Biological Sciences, revolutionized many aspects of biological research by introducing the technique of vital labeling cells in intact organisms with the jellyfish green fluorescent protein. He is one of the world’s foremost neurogeneticists and developmental geneticists.

Barry H. Honig, professor of biochemistry and molecular biophysics, has made landmark contributions to understanding the physical and chemical basis for the structure and function of biological macromolecules. He has consistently made theoretical and computational advances in demystifying basic biochemical processes, and his research has had a broad impact in structural biology.

Dennis Kent, adjunct senior research scientist, Lamont-Doherty Observatory, has made seminal and widely used findings in such fields as paleomagnetism, magnetic mineralogy and the history of the Earth’s magnetic field.

Walter Mischel, Robert Johnson Niven Professor of Humanities, is the Science and Social” and “Demystifying”. He has changed personality-social psychology by demonstrating that individual differences in social behaviors tend to be surprisingly variable across different situations. Additionally, his work on delay of gratification is a model of how to conduct personality research.

The announcement came during the Academy’s 141st annual meeting on April 20. A total of 72 new United States members were named, along with 18 foreign associates from 13 countries.

Those who were elected this month bring the total number of active academy members to 1,949.