

Multi-media mural competition to illuminate York's corridors

By JENNIFER PARSONS

During the last two years, the walls of York have been slowly changing face. The student murals which are covering up the cement and providing the colour at the end of our long halls are the result of an annual mural competition among Fine Arts students. But next year's mural additions, having been selected by a jury last week, will be a little different than the twelve murals already in place.

Organizer of the competition and Fine Arts Professor, Bruce Parsons, said that "for the first time, there will not just be paintings represented but sculpture, multi-media, drawing and electronic works." This means that among other things there will not only be works like the now familiar monkey and banana painting livening up the Ross but, for example, a new electronic work that actually responds to the number of people around it.

Untitled as of yet, the electronic work is a photographic representation of a shelf of books complete with digital clocks which, at times when there are more people around it, will actually play music. The piece was proposed by the artist, Henry Mink, who in his third year was chosen to construct the work for installation near the post office in the Ross Building.

Mink was just one of the thirty-five people who made submissions to the contest. Of these thirty-five submissions, fifteen artists' miniature mural replicas (maquettes) were selected for exhibition in the purple lounge of the Fine Arts Building. It was there that the jury selected the top five mural proposals, each of which will be installed in September.

The five selected works were chosen for their aesthetic value relative to the York environment. Encouraging artistic merit was also an aim of the competition and, with that in mind, Provost Tom Meininger was on hand to award the Provost Prize for Excellence, \$1000 cheque, for the top two entries.

The first Provost-sponsored work is by fourth year sculpture student, Michael Longford. For those of you familiar with Bethune College's



Drew donates dollars: Student President Drew McCreadie hands mural competition winner Henry Mink (right) a \$500 cheque for his electronic library.

lounge, you'll understand better how his two-story steel table on wheels will fit inside the building. The unobtrusive legs of the table stand in the bottom floor lounge while the steel figure of Norman Bethune seated on top of the table will only be seen from the second floor viewing area.

The wheeled, steel table will not be moved but, as Parsons explained, "Bethune was prepared to do his operations anywhere on the front-lines and the wheels symbolize the mobility with which Bethune worked." The figure of Bethune will be quarter sized, and the tools with which he'll be shown will be detailed replicas cast in bronze.

The second winning site-specific work is a sculpture which was also designed for the Bethune site. The jury has suggested however, that the two-ton granite rocks be placed outside McLaughlin College with the corresponding paneled sculptures placed in McLaughlin Junior Common Room. Artist Kobayashi Yutaka is a fourth-year special student from Japan, and his work will be a monumental endeavour. The red granite stone (a particularly hard stone) will be carved and capped with cast bronze geometric shapes. The matching panels, made with bronze sheeting, also incorporate geometric shapes and will be installed over the fireplace in the lounge.

The other three works selected for construction were all awarded a second prize of \$500 by York student President Drew McCreadie. The first of these works is Mink's electronic library, while the stairway in front of the coffee shop in Atkinson will be the site of second-year student Michael Caines' "Themes from Big Cities." Three colourful panels make up the work, with a transparent sheeting draped over one panel and another will have a sculptural chair built into its surface.

Across from the Credit Union and at the top of the stairs leading to the rear of Curtis Lecture Halls, the other second prize winner, Lyla Rye's 8x12 drawing will be installed. It is hoped the work will help extend the space visually with its image of continuing stairs and the illusion it creates of an exterior space.

Of course with five winners, only five of the specified twelve sites will be used. It is hoped that the remaining sites, which are selected in cooperation with the CYSF, will receive murals from upcoming mural competitions. For now, the five selected artists will spend their prize money on materials and will be hard at work over the summer constructing the new works. Until then, a walking tour list is available from the CYSF office for anyone interested in checking out murals from past competitions.

Eakin's *J'accuse* sparks controversy at IDA exhibition

By LEN CLER-CUNNINGHAM

The recent interdisciplinary Studio show at the IDA Gallery punctuated a year of art remarkably devoid of controversy, antagonism, topicality, and even passion. Sitting in isolation from these technically competent, but politically neutered, works such as 1st year visual arts student Bruce Eakin's *J'accuse* visual polemic. Less art, more propaganda, Eakin's 12 pieces of documentation appropriated from the first-year art history text and peppered with comments and visual illustrations, villified the course, and by extension the department, as "being racist, sexist, Christian-biased and dishonest."

Eakin's left-leaning feminist critique is riddled with academically questionable misrepresentations—sure, the textbook was originally written in 1926, but it is now in an eighth edition which bears little resemblance to the first—and the accusations of racism and sexism are rather heavy-handed. But, then again, overt propaganda is never subtle. In all honesty, I don't really care about the piece's possible academic transgressions. I'm more concerned about works of art which reek of benevolent didacticism—be it on behalf of, to quote, the All-Conquering Prick or the Divine Vagina.

Fortunately, the smell of an altruistic vanguard is smothered by the inclusion of a comment sheet—moral crusaders and theoretical prophets rarely invite debate, unlike Eakin. Admittedly, on one level the problem is simple; if one can accuse Eakin of misrepresentation, the Art History Department can sure as hell be accused of the same—what is advertised as 'An Introduction to Art History' is in all actuality 'An Introduction to Western Art History.' And aside from a number of negligible debates (for example, the number of women making doorjams for Medieval Churches) it is about art produced by white Christian men and, in turn, recorded by other benevolent patriarchs. Within this context, to avoid discussing the inadequacies of the text in historical investigation leaves the department

open to charges of moral culpability in perpetuating a racist and sexist mind-set.

What advertising gives, an art education should take away; but a first-year survey course will neither provide an understanding of the politics of images, nor foster the analytical tools necessary to dissect and comprehend these images. Since the course is mandatory, it could well be the only art history many people receive. The adverse consequence is that these students' knowledge of art from other cultures could well be limited to appropriated imagery.

The elements of so-called primitivism apparent in the works of Gauguin, Rodin, Picasso, Lipchitz, Giacometti and others are elements appropriated from other cultures supposedly inferior to their own. Cultural appropriation as an offshoot of political, economic, and social domination is further illustrated in the Romantics' wondrously hypocritical celebration of the Noble Savage while simultaneously selling these "Nobles" as slaves.

Eakin's piece, as part of a larger debate, is everything the majority of works seen this year are not—controversial, antagonistic, topical, and passionate. If the comment sheet is any indication, Eakin has succeeded in stimulating debate and giving York's almost now legendary apathy a kick in the face. More interesting, and encouraging, than the trite and simplistic comments written in support by the type of people who wear their politics on a T-shirt or the equally frightening reactionary and personal attacks by those opposed, were those which recognize the validity of the debate and take it one step further—offering questions rather than more slogans.

Unfortunately, Bruce Eakin has tired of battling apathy and attempting to stimulate debate, choosing instead to return to his work with hustlers and prostitutes at a downtown Youth Shelter.

Anyone interested in seeing more of his work will get an opportunity sometime in May at Kornaridis Inc. at 179 John St. where he will be exhibiting as part of a group show—"Ceramics in the City."

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