

The Davis Enterprise

Treasures from the vault

By Marilyn Moyle,
Enterprise art critic

"Art!," William Wiley once exclaimed. "What a concept! It saved my life! A place where you can do as you please."

Wiley, a professor in the UC Davis art department in the 1960s and '70s, is one of many contemporary artists whose works are featured in "Modern Multiples: Selections from the Fine Arts Collection," on display through May 23 at UCD's Nelson Gallery.

This exhibition is the result of a treasure hunt by Bob Riley, the new curator of the Nelson Gallery and Fine Arts Collection. Most of the works on paper were stored, unframed, in the basement archives of the art building. Riley has unearthed real treasures, most of them rarely seen by students or gallery visitors.

The Fine Arts Collection has been linked with the Nelson Gallery since 1976. Originally de-

signed as a teaching collection, with an emphasis on works on paper, the collection now consists of more than 5,000 objects: paintings, sculptures, ceramics and prints that represent centuries of art-making practice. It has become an extremely valuable asset to the university.

This exhibit focuses on 20th century artists, from ethical realists Kathé Kollwitz and John Sloan; and visionary, symbolic Blue Rider artists Wasily Kandinsky and Franz Marc; to graphic and conceptual innovators such as Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenberg, The Guerilla Girls and Richard Artschwager.

It's not easy to create an exciting, coherent exhibit from the Fine Arts Collection, but Riley has done it. He's like a child with a new toy, excited by the possibilities for the Nelson Gallery and the collection. This show brims with that excitement.

One of the show's strongest images is a small, humble 1940 lithograph drawing by Henri Matisse,

titled "Fruits." The print, a gift to the collection from Wayne and Betty Jean Thiebaud, is an inspiration to students who admire beautiful drawing and appreciate simplicity.

Another rare, small print is "Mechanical Composition" (1921), a delicate etching by Duchamp. It's not a great drawing, which may partly explain why this iconoclastic intellectual turned to using real objects as art, and literally turned the art world upside-down.

Many prints reflect the change in attitude toward conventional religion that occurred during the 20th century. Franz Marc (1880-1916) died at the age of 36, while fighting in World War 1. He pursued spiritual and mystical values in his art, but this exhibit's six small photolithographs, made from watercolor postcards, also reveal his passion for animals, especially horses.

For Marc, the horse represented freedom; mountains represented hope. He wanted to create symbols that, in his words, "could take their place on the altars of the future intellectual religion."

Wiley's etching, "There is No Buddha Here" (1999), a series of cartoon-like Buddha figures, illustrates his attitude toward organized religious philosophy. He was attracted to existentialism in the 1950s and was linked with West Coast Beat Generation artists. For Wiley, the joy of making art is enough.

"Pontchartrain" (1997), another outstanding, irreverent and dramatic work, is by Robert Colescott, an artist born in Oakland. It's a large (41-by-117 inches), colorful, four-panel sugar-lift and spit-bite aquatint, soft ground etching and drypoint, printed by Crown Point Press in San Francisco.

The title comes from a large lake near New Orleans, where Colescott's parents lived before he was born. The print is based on one of his large paintings on canvas. The images include gunslingers, naked ladies, a



Art review

Modern Multiples

Where: UC Davis Nelson
Gallery, 124 Art Building;
752-8500

When: through May 23

Gallery hours: 11 a.m. to 5
p.m. Monday through Friday;
2 to 5 p.m. Sunday

bright red, yellow and black swirls of color. One art writer has called Colescott's works "volatile stews."

Roy de Forest's 1981 color lithograph on paper, "Red Dog," is less volatile but no less compelling. It's an unusually grim de Forest composition. A dog and a leg hang from the bare limbs of a tree. Black, energetic, scribbly, anxious lines, with the red dog as the focus, create a memorable image. This lithograph is a gift from Roland Petersen, who, with de Forest, also taught in the UC Davis art department during its exciting early days.

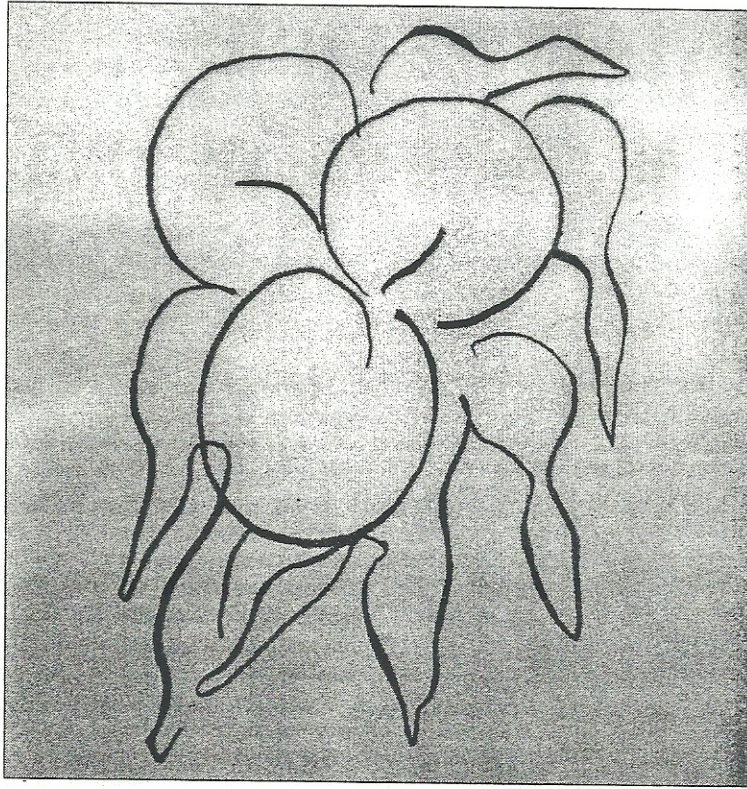
New UCD art faculty member Robin Hill promises to keep the stew boiling. Her 1997 experimental cyanotype on paper — "Place tape on paper. Expose to light. Wait." — contains images of masking tape printed by a process invented by Sir John Herschel in 1841. The images are created by exposure to natural or artificial ultraviolet light. Hill's art hero is Duchamp.

Other experimental works include Artschwager's black-painted wood, "BLPS"; printed glass mugs by Cary S. Liebowitz; and Warhol's 1966 "Campbell's Tomato Soup," screenprinted on a brown paper shopping bag.

If you've never studied art history, never heard of "BLPS" or cyanotypes, don't be afraid to visit this



"Campbell's
Soup Can,"
screenprint on
shopping bag, by
Andy Warhol



Alison Portello/Enterprise photo

"Fruits," by Henri Matisse

Condon-Gutierrez and Douglas Slayton, led by Jordan Crosby and Riley, are using this exhibit to practice their writing techniques and are adding informative, carefully researched wall labels to add to the exhibition experience.

According to Slayton, "In 1967 Artschwager addressed the context in which art was viewed, by engaging locality and installation as themes in his artwork. The pieces seen here, called BLPS, were simply cut from wood and painted black. The ovals were created in various sizes, and were produced as an undetermined number of multiples that would inhabit diverse spaces, thus destabilizing our sense of how and where the experience of art resided."

Crosby has written a label that explains the prints by Joseph Albers ("Gray Instrumentation 1," 1974) and Richard Anuszkiewicz ("Illustration for William Blake, Inward Eye," 1970). He writes, "Like his contemporary, Wassily Kandinsky, Albers believed that color pos-

sesses an autonomous force that directly affects the human mind and body."

According to Crosby, "Anuszkiewicz's interest in affinity, in the potential harmonies of certain color pairs, is rooted in his relationship with Albers.

"Like British Op Artist Bridget Riley, Anuszkiewicz welcomes the surface tension that arises from unconventional color relationships and geometric abstraction."

It should be obvious by now that this is no ordinary exhibit. It's a lesson in modern art history, and a rare experience of works from a collection that too often is buried in the art building basement.

If a student or visitor comes out of this gallery somewhat "destabilized," the exhibit has been successful. Riley is working hard to get these works from the collection out of the basement and onto the walls of other UCD buildings.

Meanwhile, this exhibit is easily accessible to the ordinary Davis resident. Do take advantage.