

CULTURE

Some wine, a Chicken Chair, and thou

Wisconsin Arts Board Fellowship award-winners exhibit at Promega

By LORI VEIT

For the Fitchburg Star

More and more scientists are beginning to realize a definite debt to art.

That's the conclusion of Dr. Robert Root-Bernstein, who helped Promega kick off its latest exhibit last week.

The exhibit showcases seven of the eight 1999 Wisconsin Arts Board Fellowship recipients, and Dr. Root-Bernstein helped launch the show with a pre-reception speech entitled *The Scientific Value of Art*.

A Michigan State University physiology professor, Root-Bernstein is the author of the books *Sparks of Genius* and *Discovery*, and has published articles in *American Scientist* and other magazines. For the last 20 years he has been collecting data that illustrate how and why art and science complement each other, and the data indicate success in science is highly correlated with artistic abilities. Using examples from Igor Stravinsky, who said that creativity was nurtured more by the limitations than unlimited possibilities, to Georges Seurat, whose pointillism foreshadowed pixelization technology, Root-Bernstein mesmerized the audience with slide after slide of examples supporting his point. He also presented results of psychological studies which correlate choice of hobby and other predispositions with success as a scientist, artist or overall career aptitude.

As for the show itself, Rick March, folk community arts specialist at the Wisconsin Arts Board, said 213 applicants

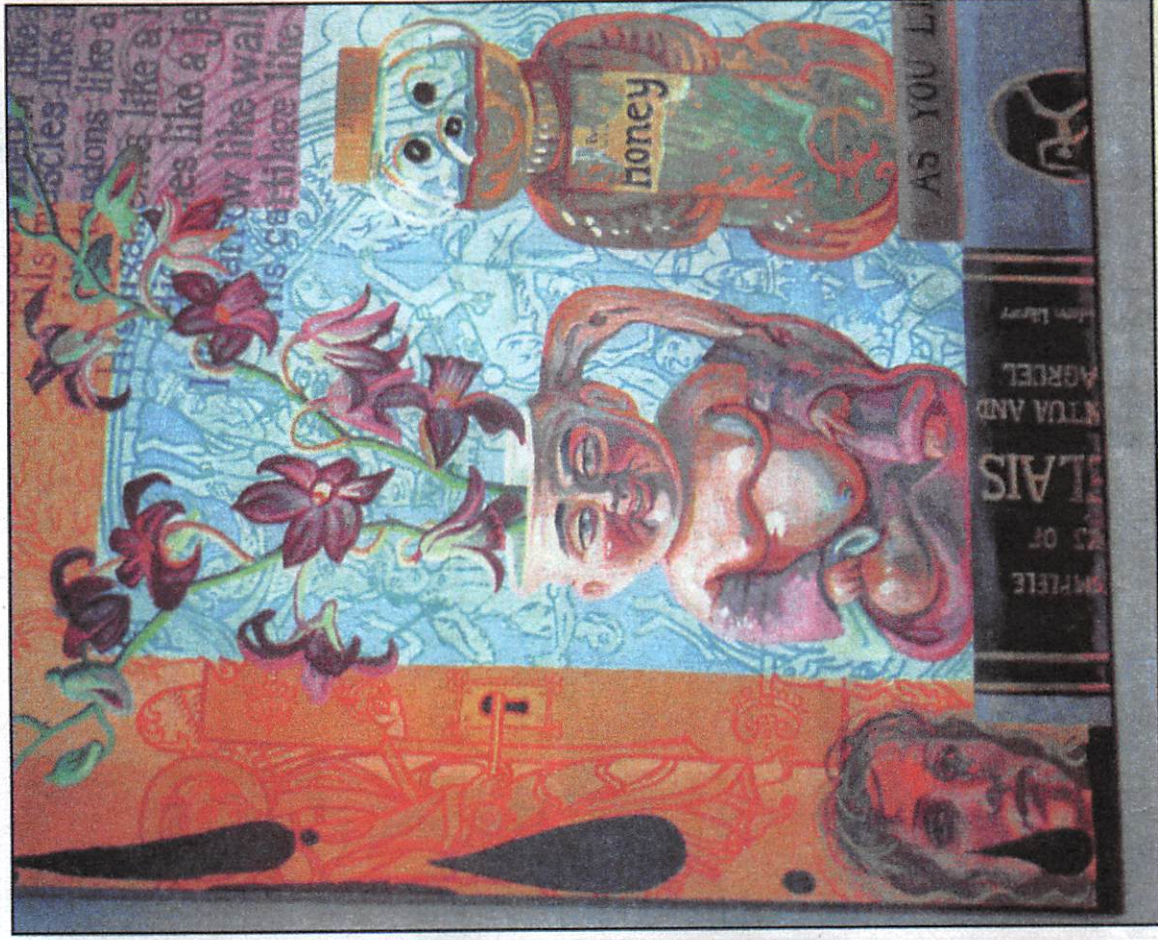
from across the state applied for board fellowships, and each of the eight winners received an award of \$8,000.

"We are pleased that we are able to provide this form of recognition to deserving Wisconsin artists," he said. "We are (also) pleased that a broad range of visual arts genres are represented among the fellowship recipients: fiber art, sculpture, graphics, painting, glass, and photography."

Four of the recipients, Fujiko Isomura, Sonya Clark, Vincent Olmsted, and Leslee Nelson, are Madison residents.

ISOMURA'S exciting and playful prints juxtapose traditional Japanese culture with modern American iconography such as the *Peanuts* cartoon characters. She grew up in Tokyo, now lives in Madison, and excels at the Asian art of printmaking. Her works are autobiographical studies of a woman attempting to fuse two starkly different cultures into one psyche. In one print a Geisha plays with cartoon cat Garfield. In another she sits at the table of Norman Rockwell's famous 1943 painting *Freedom From Want*. Her *Journey Within* renders a more melancholy look at trying to integrate herself into western culture — a Geisha in a jar in a jar. She doesn't look frightened, just tired and perplexed. The work is Dutch metal, copper and silver leaf acrylics graphic and inkjet print on paper and measures 21-by-31 inches.

CLARK'S fiber crafts express her African-Caribbean identity. Clark is an



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Diane Levesque's *Shadowy Body Stuff* mixes images of Buddha with Medieval (religious) art

assistant professor of textile and apparel design at UW-Madison. Her linear wall installation of finely woven caps is notable for its restraint and subtlety — a contrast to what most people picture in the visual arts of African or Caribbean culture, (namely bright, hot colors). The low-key color scheme forced the understated

uniqueness of each individual hat, creating a sophisticated and tasteful display.

OLMSTED began using the medium of glass mixed with marble and other media to explore his Mexican heritage. His funky human-like sculptures are strangely reminiscent of cacti, which have a human-like shape. Untitled includes a colorful jumble of nails and marbles in the head area, which could represent stones and cactus spines.

NELSON specializes in crafts, fibers, and restoring fabrics that have a history or a sentimentality to her. Her multi-media wall hangings are patched together

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Diane Levesque's *Thinker and Conceiver of Infinite Space*.

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into riots of color using vibrant scraps of gold, red, and playful 3-D characters such as monkeys in *My Demons Dancing* to goblin-like forms as in *Sentinels*. Nelson is a professor of art at UW-Madison.

Kenosha resident **DIANE LEVESQUE** teaches art at the Kenosha Institute of Arts. Her large, colorful, fanciful oil paintings are expressions of metaphor. Like Isomura, Levesque chooses to relate various incongruous images to communicate meaning. *Shadowy Body Stuff* mixes images of Buddha with Medieval (religious) art. Also like Isomura, Levesque employs a flirtation



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Vincent Olmsted's human-like sculptures are strangely reminiscent of cacti. This one is titled *House Man*.

between Western and Eastern culture. The human body and educational images are often repeated in her work. *Thinker and Conceiver of Infinite Space* is a visual mystery, almost tromp le-oil in nature: a Mona Lisa-esque young woman smiles, and seems to point gallery goers upstairs to the main cache of Levesque's canvases. Not that it's needed ... the large formats, dynamic compositions, and intense colors make these paintings seem to shout down from the second floor: We defy you to ignore us!

Photographer **ROBERT SMITH** explores what he called the exquisitely ordinary aspects of ordinary life. His moody black-and-white landscapes are explicitly stagnant and surreal. There is a sad beauty to them. Smith lives in Milwaukee, and is a professor at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design.

WOUTERINA DA RAAD is an outdoor sculptor, self-employed artist, and gardener who lives and works in Beldenville. Her cement and glass *Chicken Chair* was the hit of the evening, with reception-goers giddily taking each other's photo in the chair at the urging of curator Daniel Swadener. A videotape of da Raad's studio and artistic philosophy played next to the chair, and a neighboring vase with dried flowers completed a tableau that lent the convincing illusion of being outdoors. Her installation of highly decorated all-weather furniture and accessories was almost literally a breath of fresh air in an indoor art gallery, where ordinarily art is looked at, but never touched. de Raad says she seeks to create timeless, imaginative journeys through her work.

The work of fellowship recipient, photographer Janica Yoder of Dousman, was not featured.

Exhibit Curator Daniel Swadener served as a member of the Wisconsin Arts Board Fellowship Award review panel. He stated: "We're proud to recognize and showcase the contributions of these outstanding artists. Their achievements are constant reminders of the power and capacity of art to enlighten and enrich our lives."

Promega Biopharmaceutical Technology Center is located at the Fitchburg Center, 5445 East Cheryl Parkway in Fitchburg. The exhibit is open to the general public Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., or by appointment. The exhibit will be on display until November 24, 2000.

The author is a freelance writer and designer