

## arts/entertainment

## Artist uses everyday objects in his work

By Martha Murdock

When you meet someone who sees beauty in the lines of a Clorox bottle, you know you've found a soul with a special artistic sense.

Sheldon Art Gallery found such a man in Robin Smith, whose paintings will be on display through Sept. 23.

The first quality many viewers see in Smith's paintings is the abundance of household objects. His still life paintings are filled with eggs, Pepsi cans, fruit, silver platters, and meat grinders. The same objects appear again and again.

Critics have found that many still life painters exploit a small range of subjects. As Alfred Frankenstein, a California art critic has written, "Their basic interest lies in formal arrangement: reset the table so that new silhouettes appear, and they are happy."

This is partly true of Smith. He is concerned also with light, reflections and color.

"I like the way light moves in and around objects," he said "I see eggs a lot because they're perfect forms and have lots of color. Usually you look at eggs and you say they're just white, but they're filled with color. I like reflections in silver and all the colors they produce."

Although his Sheldon exhibit is Smith's first one-man show, he is an experienced artist. Because his father was a painter and architect, Smith, 36, has long been interested in art. At first, he worked with photography, but when he entered art school he began painting seriously.

**GROWING UP IN** Maine and Massachusetts, he attended the Swain School of Design in New Bedford, Mass., and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Skowhegan, Maine. During 1974 and 1975, he was a UNL student. In 1978, Smith took first place in Omaha's Metropolitan Arts Council show with "Writing," on display at Sheldon.

Smith said there have been many influences on his work. He said of his use of color, "I try to copy nature. I try to apply the laws of color, the physical properties."

Some of his works contain bright hues. "A definite influence on my color was Edouard Vuillard, a French painter at the beginning of the century who was a Fauve



Photo courtesy of the artist

Smith's "Self-portrait, Eggs, Silver Bowl" . . . exhibited at Sheldon.

at one time. Hans Hoffman also affected me."

The Fauvist movement of the early years of the 20th century and Hoffman, a member of the abstract expressionist movement in the 1940s, where both known for their vivid hues.

Smith's "Eggs and Pepsi Cans," which is included in the Sheldon exhibit, shows a table at eye level. The table edge is a bright red line and above on the tabletop are a row of Pepsi cans and eggs. The red line carries one's eyes across the work, emphasizing the rhythm created by the objects.

"THERE'S A DEFINITE design in that painting," he said. "I'd been studying Cezanne's landscapes and their pattern effect. My theory also was influenced by a 15th century Italian painter named Piero della Francesca, who did religious paintings

that were very geometric."

Smith takes techniques from the past and applies them to his art. His "Eggs, Oranges Tryptych" hangs at Sheldon. A tryptych is a painting composed of three separate panels.

"In the early Italian religious renaissance or even before, in about the thirteenth century, tryptychs were done a lot. I way always fascinated in how the three panels related. I wondered how I could apply that relation to still life. I did a whole series of tryptychs of which this is the only one left."

In addition to his still life works, Smith also does portraits.

"I've done a lot of self-portraits and usually I turn out looking serious and stern. I wanted to get away from that." In one portrait at Sheldon, Smith shows himself with a table suspended over his head.

"I'm concerned with the psychological effect of having a table at eye level. What I'm really doing is regressing the viewer, taking him back as a kid. What I did for that self-portrait was to set the mirror higher than my head to get the effect of an adult looking down at a child."

**SO HOW DOES** an artist with so many theories and esoteric ideas become interested in Clorox bottles? Smith attributes the style of his work "Clorox Bottle" to Giorgio Morandi, an Italian still life painter of this century. Smith talked of light and color.

"But," he added, "I don't think Morandi used Clorox bottles. Clorox bottles are really beautiful. I may do a whole series on them."

"When you take the label off, the bottle is white and has that blue top. The shape is beautiful: it has great curves, arabesques. That's some Matisse influence there."

Smith has a special feeling for all the objects he uses.

"That black pocketbook that appears in so many of the paintings has been obsessing me lately. I like to go to junk stores and look for objects. Treasurers are what they really are. They all have some kind of meaning for me."

He also has a certain affection for his works.

"I really hate to sell my paintings. When I was in school I would always put 'not for sale' on them."

Beyond his art, Smith has other interests. Living in Ashland, he is a "house-husband," taking care of his 11-month-old daughter while his German wife works as the program director of a mental retardation program in David City. Smith plays guitar and calls himself "an avid bluegrass musician." His other vocation is tending beehives.

"ON A SCALE of one to 10, I'd give myself a three," he said. "Out of 10 paintings I can get three good ones. That's better than I used to do. I used to get just one of ten. Every painter has to make some bad paintings. That's an inescapable fact. I'm getting better."

However, Smith doesn't crave notoriety. "After I'm dead maybe, but it scares me right now. If my ego was inflated, I'm not sure what it would do me."

## Corrupt government is once again cinema message

By Pete Schmitz

*The Seduction of Joe Tynan*, written by Alan Alda, who also stars in the title role, has many alluring qualities. In the end, however, the viewer is left cold.

The main problem with this film is that its story, as well executed as it may be in parts, is painfully unimaginative.

## review

After the numerous political-personal scandals of the 1970s, the entertainment industry has capitalized on, we should know by now that "decent" politicians in Washington are easily led astray, as Joe Tynan is, by the temptations of power, lust and recognition.

We have been informed by popular magazines that the demands made of our statesmen put much strain on their family lives. Enter Senator Tynan's unhappy wife (Barbara Harris), foul-mouthed son and daughter.

Many times our civics lessons have taught us that politics often dictate that personal feelings for friendly colleagues must be put aside. This is where Melvyn Douglas comes in as Joe's elder, southern mentor in the Senate, who has a penchant for speaking French when things don't go his way.

On many occasions, Americans are somehow lucky enough to learn about the wild parties and extra-marital romances that our government leaders engage in. Alda makes sure to include this in his script, utilizing the talent of Rip Torn, who plays another southern Senator who is macho to the hilt. Meryl Streep is Karen Trayner, an activist-lawyer who also is our hero's mistress.

Fortunately though, Alan Alda as the senator, is ironic, funny and believable. His striking resemblance in looks and aura to former New York Mayor John Lindsay, is an

asset. Many people also will appreciate his Jimmy Stewart, nice-guy appeal.

As Karen Trayner, Meryl Streep attracts the audience with her sensuous and calculating manner. But there are flaws with her role.

First of all, one cannot help thinking that Karen became a lawyer because her husband travels a lot for his company. Also, one gets the idea that her success in her profession is due to having a powerful father who has been in the political game for a long time.

Furthermore, the abrupt change in Karen's behavior in her last scenes are inconsistent with what we've seen earlier in the movie.

Given the fact that Streep has played a spoiled socialite in *Julia*, a self-effacing girlfriend to Robert DeNiro in *The Deerhunter* and a hateful lesbian in *Manhattan* in addition to this role as a stereotypical southern belle in a Washington milieu, it is indeed strange that *Ms. Magazine* has referred to this actress as the new hope for women in cinema.

The strongest saving grace of this film is Barbara Harris. As Ellie, an articulate psychologist, mother and politician's wife, Harris is an icon of sensitivity and rationality. Like Ingrid Bergman in *Autumn Sonata*, this actress conveys a whole dialogue and subplot with just her facial expressions.

The most impressive piece in this screen event is when she listlessly gives a speech at a banquet in her husband's honor. This scene relates in most substantial terms the harm done to individuals by liberals who act harshly to those around them while contemplating the fate of the masses.

When movie awards are passed out, Harris may get the recognition she deserves.

Also likely to garner an award or two is Melvyn Douglas. This actor evokes an amazing amount of sympathy for the character he plays, who wants a racist appointed to the Supreme Court so he does not have to face him as an

opponent in his re-election bid.

In all fairness, credit must be given to Alda for some memorable parts in his screenplay. For example, young Tynan's reaction to being the butt of his father's joke on the Merve Griffin Show.

The scenario is helped further by the cinematographer (Adam Holender) in his frequent use of individual dual close-ups of the performers. This accentuates the alienation and loneliness that plagues many of the characters. However, Holender's manipulation of light failed to capture the different tones that were germane to various settings and moods.

Also inadequate is the pokey music of Bill Conti. His score would have been more suited in an episode for *Death Valley Days*.

Despite the weaknesses of Alda's story and, in particular, his ambiguous way of ending the film, this actor-turned-writer at least has proven that he is capable of creating something much more powerful, if only he is willing to take a few risks. It was a mistake to try so hard at being entertaining and didactic with his first script.

## Gould performs

Ronald Gould will kick off a series of organ recitals on the Bedient organ at the Wesley House Chapel, 640 N. 16th St., 8 p.m. Sunday.

Gould, professor of music at Youngstown State University in Ohio and organist-choirmaster at St. John's Episcopal Church in Youngstown, holds degrees in sacred music. He studied with Hugh Porter and Vernon DeTar.

His program will include German, French and American music from three centuries, including works by Bach, Clerambault, Luebeck, Brahms, Hindemith and UNL Professor Emeritus Myron Roberts.