

Painter creates silent language

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

His fascinations with everything from frosting to foods to freeways make Wayne Thiebaud one of the most influential contemporary visual artists of the 20th century.

But he'd never say that. A genuinely modest Thiebaud gave a lecture and slide presentation Saturday at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater. He focused on slides of other artists' work that had influenced him, such as Pablo Picasso, Vincent Van Gogh and Krazy Kat, a cartoon.

Before he began painting in 1947, Thiebaud was a cartoonist and commercial artist. One of the few pieces of his that he showed was "Salads, Sandwiches and Desserts," a major holding of the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery collection.

Thiebaud also would never say he was an artist.

Rather, he said, there is a clear distinction between artist and painter, and he is of the latter.

"Art is a dirty word," he said. "It has many fuzzy distinctions. Art is a kind of discourse. It's highly abstract and unclear.

"It's like love. It's difficult to know what the hell it is," Thiebaud laughed.

The painter said that while art could relate to many things which were fantastic, it could theoretically conclude to do away with itself.

On the other hand, he said, painting is concrete.

"It's very specific. It's there for you to touch," he said.

He said a painting was limited to whatever it proposed to do.

"Every painting is an autonomous language. It is a language of silence," he said. "Art is not that way. Art deals with the tongue, ear and mind."

While appreciating a painting, Thiebaud said, one must make the distinction between a "trained" and "ignorant" eye. It takes a serious understanding to realize a painting's full potential, he said.

"Painting is commemorative, layered and deals with a state of silence," he said. "Painting is dead, according to many people, and I would agree with them.

"It is ... to them," he said. "It can only be enlivened by those who wish to enliven it."

A sense of empathy, or the transfer of oneself into something, creates a sort of body language in reaction to a painting, he said.

Painting becomes a language, one of the oldest languages we have as human beings, he said.

"Painting, as a language, is more like the birth of a colt," Thiebaud said.

A painting requires a human being to see in as well, he said.

"It's like looking at clouds and finding so many things in them."

After examining all the works that



Wayne Thiebaud, a renowned painter, lectures and demonstrates to an audience Saturday morning at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater.

Jon Waller/DN

had influenced him, Thiebaud went on to display a few of his own works.

Watermelons, basted turkeys, cherries and cakes were "such fun I couldn't leave it," he laughed. Cosmetics, people, plastic flowers and even paint cans themselves surrendered them-

selves to Thiebaud's mastery.

His passion for painting is as strong as his enthusiasm for his other occupation — teaching.

Thiebaud is a professor of art at the University of California-Davis, where he instills the same values he has of

his work into his students.

"The idea of individuality is getting the cart before the horse," Thiebaud said. "Everybody's already an individual, which leaves the real challenge to get good at doing something you want."



Courtesy of Douglass Kent Hall

Portia de Rossi, Elle MacPherson and Kate Fischer play tempting artistic models in John Duigan's erotic new film "Sirens."

Symbolic film explores sexuality



"Sirens"



"Sirens," the provocative new film by John Duigan, addresses issues such as religion, morality and sexuality in the form of a borderline soft-core porno.

The setting is 1930 Australia, and the story begins when a young minister, Anthony Campion (Hugh Grant, "Remains of the Day"), and

his wife Estelle (Tara Fitzgerald) drop in on a controversial artist at the behest of the Bishop of Sydney.

This artist, Norman Lindsay (Sam Neill, "Jurassic Park"), has entered a potentially offensive painting in an upcoming exhibition. Campion is asked to talk Lindsay into withdrawing his entry.

Lindsay lives in a secluded hideaway with his wife, children and three beautiful models who are posing for a work depicting the Sirens, creatures of Greek myth who would lure sailors to their death with their seductive singing.

Campion is unsuccessful in his debates with Lindsay, and he and his wife each face sexual temptation that threatens to destroy their marriage.

The eccentric plot is interesting as well as erotic, wrought with vague symbolism and weird twists. There

are some obvious phallic and religious references, and there is a recurring image of an ocean liner.

The cinematography of both the natural and the human scenery in the film is exceptionally well-done. Shot on location in the Blue Mountains of Australia with swimsuit model Elle MacPherson, the aesthetic value of the show is high.

Grant and Fitzgerald give solid performances as the intimidated couple who find themselves out of their sexual league. Neill is wonderful (as always) as the outlandish artist who refuses to cater to the prudish whims of the church. And MacPherson is actually good as Sheela, the aggressive leader of the Sirens.

For fans of deep symbolism and characters wearing birthday suits, "Sirens" is a scream.

— Joel Strauch

Dancers amaze audience, improvise to live music



By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

Inconceivable twists of limbs and bodies paired with jazzy notes of subtle harmonies during the Parsons Dance Company and the Billy Taylor Trio's performance Saturday night.

The New York-based modern dance company, led by exceptional dancer David Parsons and pianist Billy Taylor's jazz trio, created an artistic experience for both the eyes and ears.

"Bachiana," the dancers' first compilation, moved from sweetly amusing to deeply passionate. They transformed into a dizzying whirl of black and red splashed across the stage.

Like quirky little kittens on a spring day, they twisted and bounced to the plucking tunes of Bach's harpsichord melodies.

A shocking transformation occurred during "Caught," Parsons' solo performance. With the use of a strobe light, he appeared to be suspended, or flying, in midair.

Set to hollow, synthesized space music, "Caught" was like an animated "flip book" series of movements. Parsons was in complete command of both space and time as he stunned the

audience for a truly "Oh my God" experience.

A little boy shouted "He's got a wire. I know he's got a wire." A man in the front said, "Michael Jackson, eat your heart out."

The Billy Taylor Trio followed suit with a complete solo set. The highlight was "His Name Was Martin," a subdued, reverent tribute to Taylor's hero Martin Luther King Jr.

The dancers and musicians then combined their talents on stage for "Step Into My Dream." With Taylor's opening piano chords, the dancers slowly crept out from their haven under the piano.

In dusty gray and zebra-striped leotards, various dancers would perform in front of the band. The nine elements to "Step Into My Dream" moved from stinky rap music to soulful ballads.

The most impressive selection was one in which an unknown dancer would pick one of the musicians to improvise music, to which the dancer would then improvise movement.

The performance neared the end with the dancers coming out in their leotards with red mittens and socks in an amusing, lighthearted jolt.

The crowd roared for both Parsons and Taylor, but a special applause was given to dancer Mia McSwain, an Omaha native, appropriately ending an evening of unique improvisation.

Tepee to be set up on campus

From Staff Reports

Members of the Peoples and Cultures of Native North America anthropology class, in conjunction with the University of Nebraska Inter-Tribal Exchange (UNITE), will provide an opportunity for students to observe some facets of Omaha American Indian tribal culture.

Lee Davis, assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said one of the students, who was adopted into the Omaha tribe, has constructed a tepee, which will be erected on campus. Talks on the uses and construction

of the tepee will be given while it is being set up, she said.

"Afterwards, the students will be playing two Native American group games, a running game and a sit-down gambling game," she said.

"This is a great opportunity for the students in the class to put forward culture of local Native Americans," she said.

And it will be nice for students on campus to observe such hands-on activities in a class context, she said.

The presentation will be given in the grass plot outside of Bessey Hall today from 1:30 to 2:20 p.m.