

Innovative video game released early

■ Final Fantasy VII sales skyrocket in stores.

BY CLIFF HICKS
Game Critic

It is to video gamers what the first day of Nebraska football is to every Husker fan. If you don't know what this Sunday was meant to be, you soon will.

Sunday was the original release date for Final Fantasy VII, perhaps the most highly anticipated video game in history. In Japan, the game sold 2.5 million copies in the first three days.

It spent months in translation, and the game reached stores as early as Tuesday — five days ahead of schedule. Lincoln stores began receiving copies on Wednesday, and Sony endorsed all sales of the game as soon as copies arrived. The manufacturer decided to release the game early because of the extremely high demand.

Final Fantasy VII is the latest in the Final Fantasy series from Squaresoft, a company that is rapidly becoming the most influential game publisher uninvolved with hardware production.

Concept

The Final Fantasy series is a role-playing game where players take control of a group of individuals and guide it in a story line that changes with the players' choices. Depending on the choices players make, a variety of different characters fall under their guidance.

Not only have spectacular graphics drawn fans, but so has the series' intricately woven story lines. Each of the characters is not merely a name and a face. All their pasts come into play, although some are never fully explained. Many critics have compared them to famed fantasy writer J.R.R. Tolkien's sense of background.

The scenarios, however, are most definitely not Tolkien. With a blend of politics and folklore, magic and technology, science and fantasy, the series is set in its own continuous universe. From the ostrich-like Chocobo steeds to the zeppelinesque airships, the Final Fantasy series has a life of its own.

History

Final Fantasy I was published in 1990 for the original Nintendo Entertainment System. It drew attention in a time when the machine itself could do very little. What wasn't yet capable in graphics, Final Fantasy made up for with its story line and music. Despite lauding reviews, it sold only moderately.

Final Fantasy II and III were never released in the United States. Both came out in Japan for the original Nintendo and continued to sell impressively in Japan.

Final Fantasy IV would eventually come to the United States at the end of 1991, some months after it had been released in Japan. The new system of choice was the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, and the game was renamed Final Fantasy II so as to not confuse American gamers who were fans of the series. Sales again were not spectacular despite impressive reviews.

Final Fantasy V seemed it would be added to the collection of games never to make it to the states, but in recent months, as the anticipation of Final Fantasy VII swelled, Squaresoft announced it would be ported. The



Showcase of achievement

Retired professor's paintings exhibited

BY BRET SCHULTE
Senior Reporter

Gallery Review

Marking the beginning of a long-awaited retirement, a new exhibition featuring the work of artist Dan Howard highlights his last 15 years as a University of Nebraska-Lincoln art professor and supplies the "bookend" of his scholastic career.

Entitled "Dan F. Howard: Valedictory, An Exhibition Survey of Art Work, 1982-1997," the show will be the final public display of Howard's work at UNL. It is intended as a fond goodbye from the university that has assisted Howard's career from 1974 until his retirement last spring.

The exhibition is at The Gallery of the Department of Art and Art History in Richards Hall, where Friday night's opening reception will feature Howard playing host and fielding questions regarding his artwork and career. The reception will run from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., and the gallery will be open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Sept. 25.

Howard, whose illustrious career has spanned more than 40 years, has had his work displayed in New York, Houston, Chicago and San Francisco galleries and has garnered more than 90 awards, honors and prizes. Among them are the Hulitar Prize at the Contemporary American Painting Exhibition, a Nebraska Arts Council Artist's Fellowship and, most recently, the Mayor's Arts Award presented by Lincoln Mayor Mike Johanns last spring.

Receiving nothing but praise from critics both at home and across the country has only fed Howard's desire to continue painting, he said.

"I've been inspired especially when I'm able to nurture and help along students that know what it means to be a professional and serious artist."

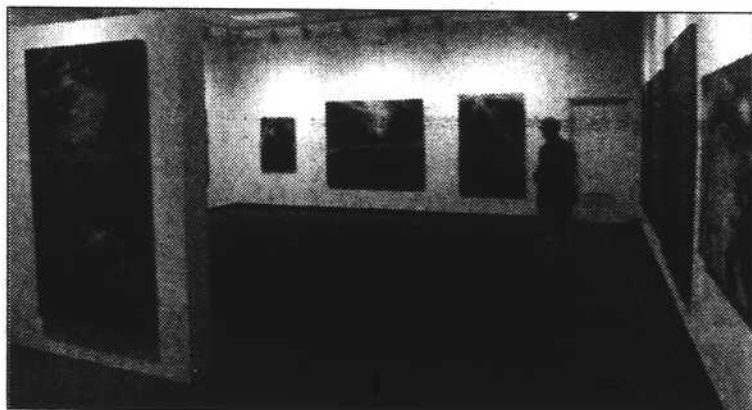
DAN HOWARD
retired art professor

"The responses to my work have been almost invariably positive, which is gratifying, but at the same time, that's not my intent," Howard said.

The showing will be split into two separate exhibits: the Richards Hall display, offering 45 pieces from 1982-1994, and the second, taking place at Anderson O'Brien Gallery, 8724 Pacific St., in Omaha from Oct. 10-31. The latter showing contains 25 pieces produced in the past three years. Containing 70 pieces total, the combined exhibit is the largest solo display of Howard's work ever made available.

Howard said the difference in the two exhibits will be noticeable.

"(The Omaha exhibit) features different themes and different stories, which reflects the most recent tendencies of my painting,"



LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN

ABOVE: DAN HOWARD VIEWS some of his 45 works painted between 1982 and 1997 that are being showcased in The Gallery of the Department of Art and Art History.

TOP: DAN HOWARD'S LAST 15 YEARS' worth of work is now on display in the Richards Hall gallery. Howard has been teaching at UNL since 1974.

he said.

After having been chairman of the UNL art department from 1974 to 1983, Howard felt stifled by his administrative obligations and returned to teaching. The inspiration from working with students rejuvenated his passion for his artwork, he said.

"Since going back to full-time teaching, I've been able to keep at work at a regular basis," Howard said. "I've been inspired especially when I'm able to nurture and help along students that know what it means to be a professional and serious artist."

As a result, his own drawings and paintings increased both in volume and diversity, propelling his career and earning him recognition across the country.

While "Valedictory" features both drawings and oil paintings, the paintings compose the majority of the show's pieces. Howard said that although drawings are a good way to get an idea onto a visual format, his final pieces are generally produced with oil paint.

"My favorite medium is oil paint," he said. "No other medium is comparable as far as its expressiveness, versatility and being

manipulated in the direction the artist wants to take it."

With his paintings, Howard has experimented with a variety of subject matter and styles of expression. Ranging from a blunted and monochromatic portrait of clergy to abstract impressions of streaking color, his paintings strikingly contrast visions of light and dark and near and far, and they frequently project a three-dimensional image to the viewer.

"Typical subject matter for me is a diversity of subject matter," he said. "I've used a variety of subject matter, and that has kept me fresh. I've focused on figure subjects, landscapes and interior settings. I try to establish more of a universal connection between myself and the world I inhabit."

Now that retirement is at hand, Howard plans to slow down a bit and enjoy the world he has painted for so long. He plans a series of trips with his wife and will continue to exercise his craft, but at his own pace.

"I'm very much looking forward to it," Howard said of his new-found free time. "This gives me the flexibility to do what I'd like to do."