

Sheldon an educational asset

SHELDON from page 16

Sheldon, who increased his sister's gift with 40 percent of his own estate.

The family stipulated the museum be designed by an architect of international repute. Johnson was chosen. Ground was broken Jan. 12, 1961, and the gallery was dedicated on May 16, 1963.

The building stands as a classic work. Siedell said because of its self-sufficiency, it poses challenges.

"The emphasis of the building is on high modern art in the 1960s," he said. "The history of the collection runs parallel to the building. If you look at the late '50s and '60s, the gallery was coming into its own."

"It was collecting work from that period, and you can kind of count the building as a work it collected — an acquisition that has been very important to the gallery for the next 35 years of history," he continued. "It set the emphasis for the collection."

Artistic Challenge

The Sheldon is different from other galleries in that it is separate from the school of art and art history. Siedell said that separation sometimes makes interaction difficult.

Christin Mamiya, an art history professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said the separation doesn't exist because of the physical distance of the buildings.

"The real limitation is the resources," she said, "in that the staff and budget (at the Sheldon) is so limited they can only do so much."

She added that the limited scope of the works also causes separation.

"The collection has been focused on American modern art, and that means that professors who teach other realms of art don't have any resources there to use," she said.

Mamiya has organized exhibitions to coincide with her classes in the past, but she said that is also hard to do, as the museum has a small staff that is ultimately very busy.

"To have all the works pulled takes a lot of time, and they just don't have the people to do it."

Although the resources are limited, Siedell has striven to bridge the gap between academics and art.

Artistic Endeavors

Siedell graduated from UNL in 1989 with a bachelor's degree in art history.

He completed two internships while a student at the university —

"I want to bring the gallery back to the classroom, not make it a field trip."

DAN SIEDELL
curator of the Sheldon

one at the Sheldon — and knew he was interested in museum work.

He then went to the State University New York-Stony Brook and got his master's degree in art history, criticism and theory. It was then that his focus changed.

"I became interested in the academic side of art," he said. "My focus moved from research to scholarship. I wanted to teach."

This switch in direction was one of the things that changed his future and framed his goals for the Sheldon.

He got his doctorate degree at the University of Iowa in 1995, writing a dissertation on how art historians have shaped the history of Abstract Expressionism.

After returning to Nebraska in 1991 to teach three summer classes, Siedell returned permanently after graduation in 1995 and applied for a teaching position at UNL.

As soon as Siedell returned, whether coincidence or fate, the curator of the Sheldon resigned.

George Neubert, the former director of the Sheldon, encouraged Siedell to apply. He did, and he has been the curator since July 1996.

"It was clear to me (the gallery) wanted to develop an academic relationship with the surrounding campus," he said. "I took the job with clear goals to try and reinvigorate the collection in an academic way. Having tours wasn't enough. I knew there was more there."

Art Scholarship

Siedell's main goal for the gallery is to make it a place where scholarship is possible — a place where scholars can learn in an accessible and welcoming atmosphere.

But turning the gallery into a "research collection," as Siedell calls it, is much easier said than done.

"There are days I think it has worked and days I think it hasn't," Siedell said, laughing. "It's one of those things you have to pursue — you can't just say you want to do it. You have to do it. The rhetoric alone doesn't do the job."

During the four years Siedell has

been curator, he has worked to develop a culture in the museum that fosters a climate for his academic goals.

He has placed his educational goals at the forefront, working to make them a reality through the use of in-depth study and by arranging classes that utilize the gallery spaces, such as Mamiya's class.

He is developing workshops and spreading information about the gallery, as well as continuing to bring in pertinent and meaningful exhibits.

"The challenge is in how to use the gallery in (an educational) way," he said. "It's not a challenge to program it but a challenge to bring (students) into the space. I want to bring the gallery back to the classroom, not make it a field trip."

Siedell said he is serious about his educational agenda, and if he were to leave a legacy when his time at the Sheldon ends, it would be a strong tie with the community and an instilled educational agenda.

"I am very much committed to education," he said. "It's my service to the university — it's part of what education is about. That is my tether, I guess."

"I am constantly trying to be able to think of ways this project can be geared to the academic community. It's part of the challenge. There are no easy answers."

Although the building within which he works will continue to pose challenges, Siedell said he doesn't blame the museum for making his job tough.

"Whenever I go there, I am just overwhelmed by what a beautiful place it is," he said. "When I have a rough day, I walk out into the gallery and see some work, and it's quiet and reflective."

"It takes me away from the hustle and bustle of campus life," he said. "It's completely yours — you can sit there for however long and be completely open. There aren't very many places like that, where you can be in complete control."

Siedell continued with a smile. "I guess that's what makes art."

'Sweeney Todd' brings dark comedy to theater

SWEENEY from page 12

In 1846, the story was rewritten by Thomas Prest and serialized in a London newspaper. This version inspired many plays in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

A film came out in 1936, and a ballet based on the legend was performed in 1959.

A play by Christopher Bond opened in 1973 and inspired

Sondheim to use the basic plot for a musical comedy.

The 2½-hour play is humorous, but the dark subject matter is not meant for small children, Shomos said.

However, the elaborate set, strong story and strength of the cast should make it enjoyable for everyone else, Shomos said.

"At times it's very humorous, and at times it's very poignant."

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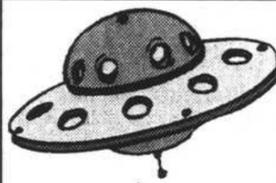
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