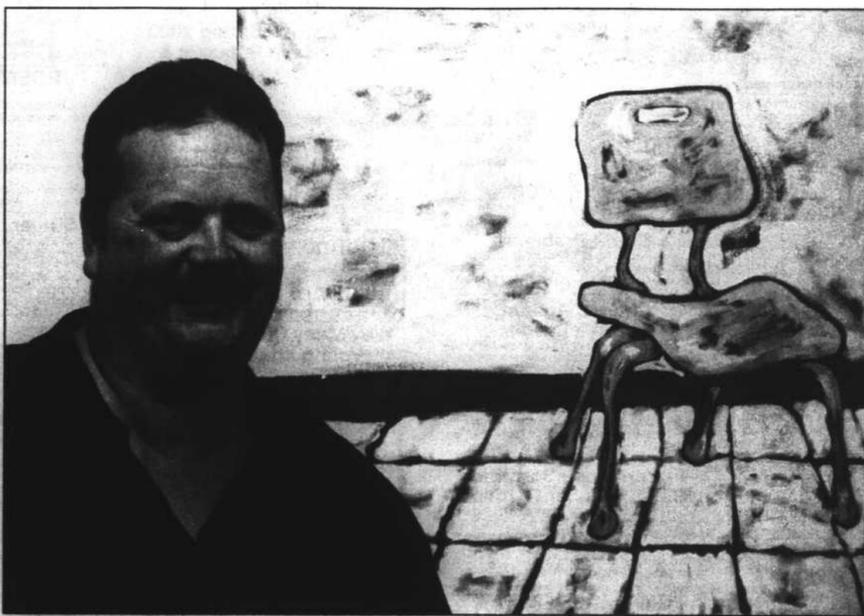


Painting a new future



TOP: Larry Griffing, a senior painting major, returned to UNL to finish his degree almost 27 years after beginning college. This second and final attempt at college has him more focused, and he is considering graduate school.

BELOW: Griffing was originally more interested in sculpture but said "I think I'm more successful as a painter..." He is committed to his work, often painting the same thing multiple times.



Heather Glenboski/DN



Courtesy of Larry Griffing

Fine art of maturity shines through in Griffing's paintings

BY BILLY SMUCK

Nearly 27 years after Larry Griffing began college, he is finally realizing his dream.

Working toward a bachelor's degree in fine arts, this 46-year-old senior undergraduate is painting a new future for himself.

"As far back as grade school I wanted to be an artist," he said. "I remember telling my second-grade teacher that's what I was going to be."

The Lincoln High graduate went on to attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln during the mid-1970s but never completed his degree.

"It's like I tell people sometimes - that I had to take 36 semesters off to get my head together," Griffing said.

"Actually, I wasn't very serious about much of anything, and I didn't have a clear idea of where I was going or what I wanted to do."

Now he has re-enrolled at UNL, and this time he is focused and driven. He was initially more interested in sculpture, but now that he has returned to school, painting is where his heart is.

"At some point, I moved to two-dimensional work, and I got better at it," Griffing said. "I think I'm more successful as a painter than I was as a sculptor."

Though he was away from school for 17 years, he wasn't away from his art.

"I never stopped making art. Even when I wasn't a student, I always did some work," he said.

Now he's not just doing some work, he's doing a lot and is doing it well.

"I've been much more serious and have had better grades," he said.

According to Professor Keith Jacobshagen, who currently teaches Griffing's advanced painting course, Griffing is one of a few students who stands out from the rest of the class.

"Larry is very committed," Jacobshagen said. "He's always arriving to class before I do, and after class, he sticks around and keeps working."

Jacobshagen said Griffing's work is well-planned.

"Larry has an ability to take an idea and work in a linear trajectory," he said. "He is really able to test and probe and follow through with it."

"He'll paint something five or six or 10 different times, so you can see that idea really mature. Often students don't have that sensibility until much later on. In fact, some never acquire it."

Jacobshagen said Griffing has the maturity to produce great art.

"It takes a mature mind to be able to explore an idea to its logical conclusion like that," he said.

Granted, Griffing is older, but he doesn't necessarily feel that age and talent are correlated.

"I don't know how my age makes me any better or worse as an artist," Griffing

said. Griffing's paintings fall into two categories: stylized landscapes and what he refers to as "object paintings."

"In the landscape paintings," Griffing said, "my goal is to capture the essence of the landscape through the use of simplified forms and expressive color."

He said the object paintings are less formal.

"The object paintings are painted almost comic-book style, in which I take single objects or small groups of objects and try to make the objects become precious by isolating them and changing their scale," he said.

Griffing said he wanted to emphasize that his artistic style is important in his painting.

Griffing said one of his still-life paintings demonstrates the relationship between the subject and the process of the painting.

"It's not just a painting of some green peppers and tomatoes, but the paint almost becomes part of the subject matter because of the way I'm using the paint," he said.

"I really do think that the paint itself almost competes with what I'm painting. It's part of what I'm painting."

Griffing's paintings are often not starved for paint; his particular style uses a lot of it, he said.

"On some of my paintings, if you could jam a ruler into the paint, at times you could find paint anywhere from 1/4 to 1/8 inches thick," he said.

Griffing does not attempt to be photographically realistic in his work.

"If I wanted that, I'd probably just take a photograph," he said.

He said he feels that how he paints, using different brushstrokes and colors, is as important as what he paints.

"It's as much the handling of the paint as it is anything else," he said.

In Griffing's artist's statement, which is as brief and clear-cut as his philosophy and approach to painting are, he wrote, "I hope to create an emotional response to my paintings."

After graduation this summer, Griffing said he would like to get his master's degree and possibly teach at the university level, as well as make a living selling his art.

"I think that would be a great life," he said. "It would allow me to do something I love, which is make art, and if I could make a living at the same time, that would be a dream come true."



Courtesy of Larry Griffing

This painting of a pair of ray guns is an example of Griffing's object paintings. He singles the objects out, changes their size and makes the objects "precious." He also paints stylized landscape paintings.

Children's Museum finds new life in new space

Old favorites along with new attractions give visitors more options for fun.

BY KEN MORTON

At 2:25 p.m. Sunday, the new Lincoln Children's Museum sat relatively quiet.

A session had ended 15 minutes earlier, and the volunteers and employees of the new museum had cleared the building at 1420 P St., readying themselves for the next wave of eager children and parents.

Terry Rathe, the museum's marketing director, talked to two new volunteers to warn them of the invasion.

"Be prepared," she said. "It's going to be bedlam."

By 2:40 p.m., a distraught young couple frantically scanned the sea of young faces racing around the giant apple tree that rises up the middle of

the museum.

"Well, he couldn't have gone far," the woman said. "Let's go look in the tree."

Compared to the old location of the Children's Museum, finding a lost child in the new museum is quite a task.

The old structure at 13th and O streets covered around 12,000 square feet on one level.

The new museum houses 60 exhibits with more than 40,000 square feet on three levels.

For some, the old museum shouldn't even be mentioned in the same sentence with the new one.

Dennis Nelson of Lincoln, who was at the museum with his wife, Julie, and his three children, said the museums are completely different experiences.

"We haven't even gotten off of the bottom level, and we've already seen more here," Nelson said.

Nelson's 9-year-old son Travis

agreed with his dad.

"That prairie dog town is so cool," he said.

The prairie dog town is just one of the many new, state-of-the-art exhibits.

Other new exhibits include a truck stop, an interactive water exhibit, a hot air balloon and the 35-foot apple tree.

The museum has also improved on some of the old favorites.

The single airplane has turned into an entire airport, and the fire truck has been spruced up.

The interactive water exhibit, "Big Splash," proved to be a popular area for the weekend's estimated 3,800 visitors.

David Palmer, a museum volunteer, helped with the Big Splash physics exhibit.

Palmer, who works for Isco, a waste water treatment company, felt right at home at Big Splash.

"This is right up my alley," Palmer

"This is right up my alley. I'm glad I ended up in an area I actually knew something about."

David Palmer
museum volunteer

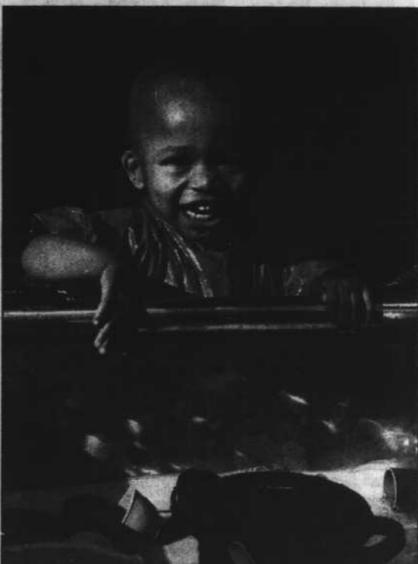
said. "I'm glad I ended up in an area I actually knew something about."

Palmer said he had been watching the progress of the building of the new Children's Museum and was impressed with the result.

"I saw the workers demolishing the building and working on the new museum," Palmer said.

"I hoped whoever was designing this thing knew what they were doing."

"From what I've seen, it's obvious they did."



Sharon Kolbet/DN

Anwar Ramsey, 20 months, plays in one of the Children's Museum's new water exhibits. The museum held its grand opening this weekend.