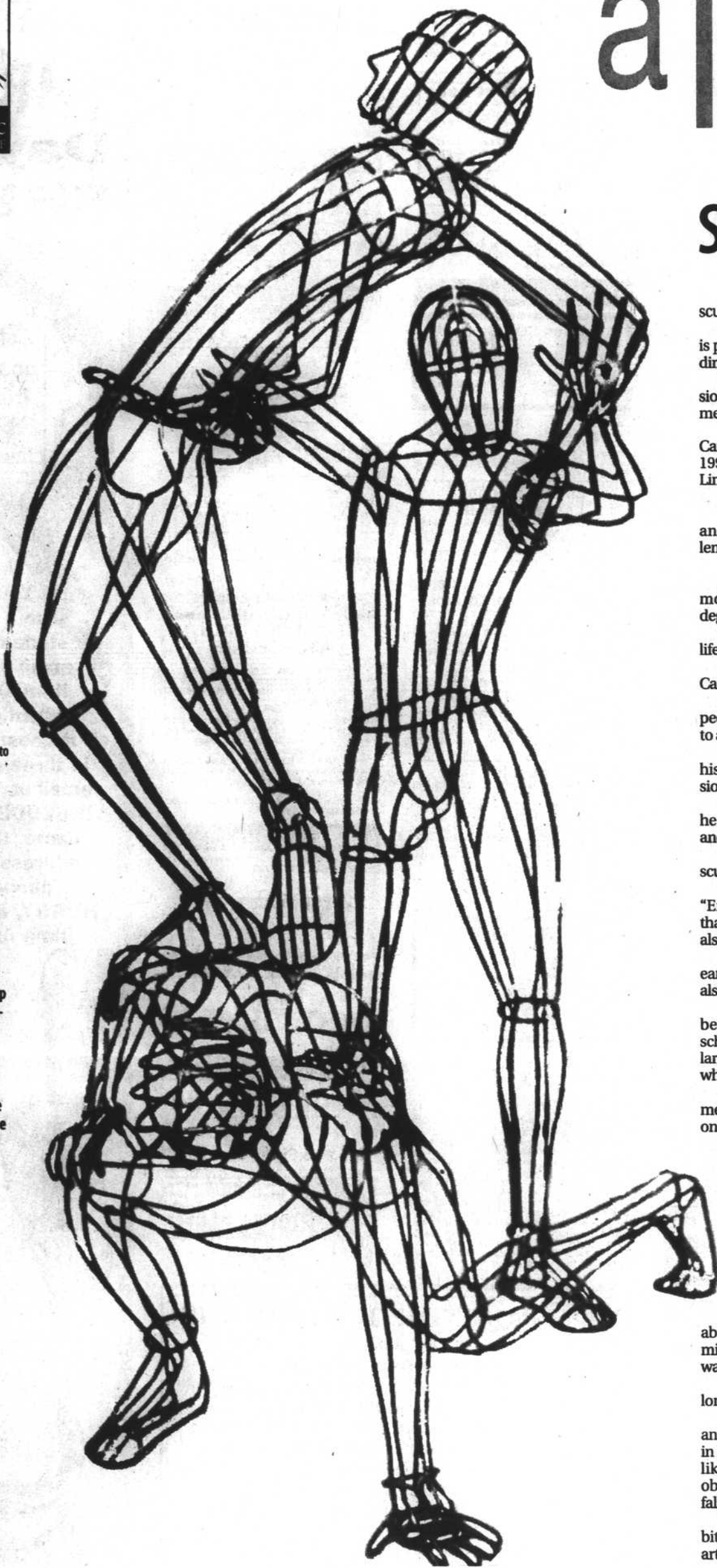




a larger scale

Sculptor used to working big



Courtesy Photo
In his most recent sculpture, senior art major Ryan Carlson freezes the image of falling. The life-size creation was inspired by a TV show in which a group of people trying to break the human pyramid record lost their balance and fell to the ground.

Farming, mechanical engineering and sculpting are three significantly different fields. But Ryan Carlson, a senior studio art major, is proof that all three fields involve corresponding knowledge and ways of thinking.

This helps explain his unconventional decision to study sculpting after a year and a half as a mechanical engineering major.

After growing up on a Nebraska farm, Carlson graduated from Orchard High School in 1996 and came to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to study mechanical engineering.

But he soon became restless. "I didn't want to sit behind a desk anymore and wasn't interested in solving math problems," he said.

He began to explore other options. Because of a lifetime of art exposure — his mom is an artist — Carlson chose to pursue a degree in art.

"My mom's been involved in art her entire life, and I did it all through high school," he said. The drastic switch was a surprise to many, Carlson said.

"I still get a lot of comments," he said. "Some people can't believe I switched from engineering to art."

But his decision to focus on sculpture and his explanation of the change makes his decision seem a bit less drastic.

"I think that's why I'm into sculpture now," he said. "In engineering you get an idea of balance, weight and structure."

Those three elements are important in sculpting, he said.

"There is a definite crossover," he said. "Engineering is breaking down structures so that they are sound and won't fall apart, which is also important in sculpture creation."

Beyond the fact that he studied engineering early on, Carlson said being reared on a farm was also ideal preparation for sculpting.

"I've been around large machinery and have been welding since I was a freshman in high school," he said. "I like working with metal and larger objects. Sculpting is just a continuation of what I've been doing all these years."

When he says he likes larger objects, he means it and reflects it in his work. So far, he has only done sculptures that are life-size or larger.

"When many people begin, the tendency is to work small and stay with a tight style," he said. "Everything is really detailed."

In his own work, Carlson also has a problem with that tendency.

"I usually think of something small but when I get into the product and get started, I know it's not going to look like I want it to without going large," he said.

After a study-abroad trip to Egypt and Greece this summer, during which he was able to see Athens' sculptures and Egypt's pyramids, his belief and passion for larger creations was reinforced.

He was amazed by the structures and their longevity.

"Seeing the enormous size of the structures and how they kind of loom over you freed me up in how I look at my work," he said. "That's why I like to work large. You walk up next to those objects and wonder what is keeping them from falling down on you."

So far, Carlson has been able to incorporate a bit of what he learned this summer into his own art.

His latest piece, which involves three human figures, gives a feeling of frozen, suspended falling.

Made out of pencil rod, the life-size piece involves a human kneeling on the ground with another human falling off of his back. A third figure stands beside the two and tries to support



David Clasen/DN



Courtesy photo

TOP: Ryan Carlson spends countless hours at the Reunion building working on his sculptures, sometimes spending the entire night.

ABOVE: At Valmont Industries in Valley, the individual pieces of Carlson's sculpture were repeatedly dipped in sulfuric acid and then rinsed. Here the pieces are being sent through the rinse tank.

the falling figure.

He said the idea stems from a TV show he saw in which a group of people were trying to break the human pyramid record and came crashing to the ground in the process.

"I just freeze-framed the image," he said. Normally with his sculptures, Carlson said he has the option of letting them rust naturally over time or painting them.

But on his latest piece, he had the opportunity to get it plated in zinc at Valmont Industries in Valley.

In the plating process, the three individual sections of his sculpture were put through a series of acid dippings and cleanings.

In the final step, his pieces were dipped in zinc, which will give the surfaces a bond that, when scratched, will heal itself, said Mo Neal, assistant professor of art and art history.

Neal taught Carlson in one of his first sculpture classes and was one of the main influences in his becoming a studio art major.

Neal described Carlson as a young artist who is wonderful at working with materials but is still learning art history and how to deal with ideas and issues.

She said art students learn by imitating, and then begin to develop their own voice as an artist.

Carlson knows how to make sculptures but is now working on his voice, Neal said.

"He's wonderful with his hands," she said. "If you send materials to him, he'll learn how to use them."

Carlson plans to use his knack for working with material to teach others. He hopes to graduate this May and plans to enroll in a one-year, post-graduate teaching program at UNL.

He then hopes to teach high school art.

"That's as far as I'm looking into the future is teaching," he said. "If the materials are available, I would like to continue creating sculptures the rest of my life."

story by josh nichols

Students explore art, selves in self-portraits

BY DANE STICKNEY

At the end of a corridor on the third floor of Lyman Hall sits a girl on a large piece of paper, scribbling.

The setting is dimly lit with generic florescent light, and from afar, her action is just a shadowy, abstract movement. But a closer view reveals what she is doing all alone in the hall.

She's drawing herself.

Her ankles to be exact. Pencil outlines of her feet surrounding white paper is all that is left to be finished. The rest — her hair flowing upward in an imagined wind, her arms crossed over her heart — is blackened with ink.

Amanda Dymek's drawing looks like herself — to an extent. It's not an exact resemblance, but that's not the point.

"I'm just trying to get

across a message," she says. "A message about how I feel, how I view myself."

That, as well as familiarizing herself with various artistic mediums, is the point of the assignment, which asks students to produce a life-sized portrait of themselves.

Dymek, a freshman architecture major, is one of many University of Nebraska-Lincoln students enrolled in Visual Literacy 140, a class meant to teach design students how to express themselves through various visual mediums.

In a nutshell, the class lays down the foundation students need to be designers, said Liz Ingraham, assistant professor of art and the class instructor.

"This class teaches basic design principles that are needed whether you want to build buildings, makes

dresses, design a Web page or produce a painting," Ingraham said.

The class, which consists of architecture, art, interior design and textiles majors, is a compilation of projects meant to teach students different aspects of design.

The self-portrait project is a lesson in drawing — the mediums, the technique, the expression. And Ingraham said she was pleased with the outcome.

"This is a huge undertaking that demands a lot of time and effort," she said. "A lot of the work is very sophisticated. I'm proud of the students, but more importantly, they're proud of themselves."

To produce the self-portrait, students laid down on a piece of paper and had fellow students trace their bodies. Then, using pictures, mirrors or observations, they filled in the outline to produce some

sort of representation of themselves — a process that took Dymek uncountable hours.

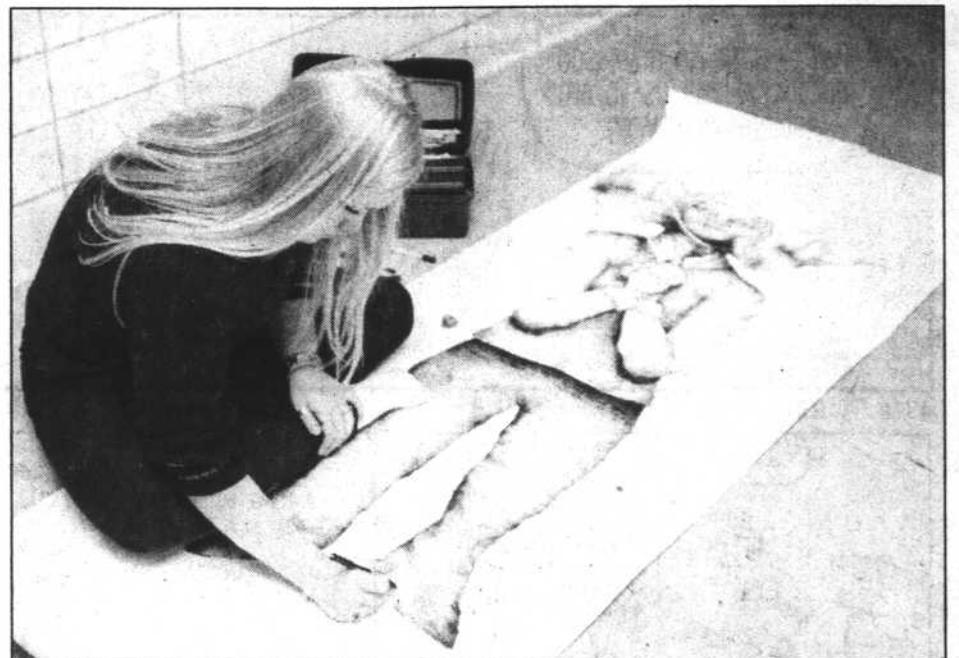
This process is more valuable than the product, Ingraham said.

"It's really interesting for them to see exactly how much space they take up in this world," Ingraham said. "Once they get a grasp of that, then they have to decide how to show themselves in some sort of context drawn from their own experiences."

Ingraham said many of the drawings will be displayed in an exhibition starting Dec. 11 in Richards Hall.

Dymek said she would feel comfortable with people looking at her portrait.

"People who look at this will get a better experience of what I feel," she said. "It's made me know myself better."



Sharon Kolbet/DN

Amanda Dymek, a freshman architecture major, puts some finishing touches on her self-portrait. Dymek and others in a visual literacy class were asked to create life-size drawings that captured their personality.