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Art is communication, historian says

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maribeth dwyer • news editor

IMMEDIATELY

ART IS COMMUNICATION,
HISTORIAN SAYS

holmquist/kmr
12/5/80
Dailies w/ pic
Great Falls, Butte, Anaconda

by Cary E. Holmquist
UM Publications and Media Relations

MISSOULA--

"Children are very receptive to most types of art, but as they grow older, art somehow becomes foreign to them. I try to teach people to overcome that foreign-ness and learn to like art again. Everybody can because everybody has some kind of artistic ability. It's a matter of appreciating it and then doing it. I want my students to be able to go to a museum and use that appreciation to make art a living part of them."

That's a description of part of the mission University of Montana art historian Julie F. Codell sees for herself. And according to her students and fellow faculty members, it's a case of "mission accomplished" with more to come.

Students don't come to Codell's classes because they are easy. Juliette Crump, head of the UM dance division, whose students must take one of Codell's classes, said that students tell her that Codell is very demanding and that they have to work hard to please her.

But Codell attributes their hard work to their energy and enthusiasm for learning. That kind of supply and demand seems to be a good combination for yielding success for both sides.

If you talk to students, though, most of the supply also comes from Codell. Patti Forsberg, an art graduate student from Salt Lake City specializing in watercolor painting, said that Codell's broad background and knowledge of art history allows her to offer many classes to expose students to art they never would have seen before.

(over)

Codell said she believes that art is a form of communication for expressing cultural values. "It's not purely a personal matter. After all, people don't go around talking to themselves, they talk to other people about many things--it's the same with art.

"In my art history courses, we begin with a chronological look at cultures and study art's role in those cultures. For example, art is often used for political, commercial, and religious purposes. In the upper-division classes, we also look at how art is produced and the effects of culture and economics on production and the artists."

Codell commented that students get fine studio instruction at the University of Montana, but they also need to know how to criticize and evaluate art and how to articulate those views. So she teaches courses in criticism and writing "in order for students to be able to learn about and express the underlying assumptions of art and how we see it."

Forsberg said Codell has "very high professional standards about writing, and she doesn't relax them for students--she helps students to learn how to write well and (learn) what other writers say."

Other students and faculty at the University also think Codell is very successful in communicating what she knows about art and its history, saying she is an exceptional, stimulating lecturer and that she has "great rapport" with her students. Mel Watkin, an art graduate student from Boston specializing in ceramic sculpture, said that Codell is happy to answer students' questions, "and if she doesn't know the answer, she'll research until she finds it.

"She gets everybody talking and articulating their ideas in class," Watkin said, "giving everyone the experience of verbally expressing themselves. The ideas that come out really help us understand ourselves, our art, and other artists."

Both Watkin and Forsberg commented on Codell's interest in students' individual projects and studio work.

"If you have an interest," Watkin said, "she'll help you with it, no matter what it is."

(more)

Julie Codell--add three

Rudy Autio, professor of art, was chairman of the art department when Codell was hired at UM as an assistant professor in fall 1979. He said her appreciation for studio arts as an art historian made her unusual, but that her broad experience in art, literature, and history was exceptional and that's why she was hired. At the time, faculty members from the UM College of Arts and Sciences were asking the School of Fine Arts and the art department for a person with an interdisciplinary approach to art and culture.

Codell let no grass grow beneath her feet. She lectured at a conference on "Women in the Arts" last spring at UM. And she coordinated and participated in a public lecture series at the Missoula Museum of the arts, entitled "The Arts and Society." It involved an IU English professor and UM faculty members from drama, dance, art, philosophy, humanities, and English. She said the series was received well by the Missoula community--so well that an anonymous donor has given her funds for an art history lecture series, which she hopes will be presented in spring, 1981. She also wants to continue the arts and society series next fall.

Her other plans at UM include continuing to upgrade and expand UM's art slides collection since she must use slides in class in lieu of viewing actual paintings, drawings, and sculptures. She also wants to expand the art history curriculum with new courses in criticism, Renaissance, Baroque, and Rococo art, seminars, and special problems in which students are interested.

Autio said student respect for Codell is deep, and was recently exhibited when the UM Student Art Association asked her to conduct a workshop on preparing portfolios, resumes, and applications for job interviews. "It was beyond her duty," Autio said, "but she did it, and the students are grateful."

She also encourages students to research their work at UM and abroad. And her own research goes on, in preparation for classes and for professional papers and articles. She said she has been taught a great deal in methodology and criticism by her husband Dan Rubey, who is currently writing a book on film. She added that they often help each other with the work they do, including the articles they write for local publications and professional journals.