2013 Research at Andrews

Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/researchbrochure

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/researchbrochure/5

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Research and Creative Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Annual Research Brochure by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact trobtsn@andrews.edu.
Greg Constantine is working on a ransom note. A very big one, with very specific demands.

Rick DeVos—hand over the $200,000 ArtPrize or else—wait 4 further instructions—come alone 2 my venue with unmarked $20 bills or else—no cops or else—the public will vote 4 me anyhow or else

It’s his submission for this September’s ArtPrize exhibition in Grand Rapids, Mich., and the seasoned ArtPrize participant has gotten to the heart of the competition: “Why else do so many curious people fill the streets of Grand Rapids to observe and enjoy the art buzz? Why else would I be so open and transparent about my motives?” he says in his tongue-in-cheek artist statement. “I believe the voting public will understand. However, if Rick DeVos or the FBI take this too seriously, I’m in trouble.”

Self-referential, clever, and sometimes outrageous, Greg Constantine, emeritus research professor of art and artist-in-residence, has made a career of helping people think about art differently. His three

controlled context of a model organism. In general, “enzyme functions in the fish might indicate what it does in the human,” says Lyons. So if Carboxypeptidase-O shows up in a zebrafish’s intestine, researchers know where to begin looking for that same enzyme in humans.

IN THE LAB AT ANDREWS

Lyons is in the process of setting up Andrews’ labs to do this kind of genetic work on zebrafish. Zebrafish are quite finicky, and require well-controlled temperature, light and clean water, in addition to a defined night and day cycle. So the zebrafish research is on hold while he sets up the proper equipment. The tank in the back is just to see if his zebrafish can produce the quantity of embryos he will need—and they’re also fun to watch.

Once he gets the zebrafish installed in their research tanks, he’ll begin collecting their embryos. Under a dissecting microscope, he inserts a gene encoding a modified carboxypeptidase enzyme into the embryo with a fine-tipped glass capillary to create what will become a transgenic zebrafish. Transgenic zebrafish, modified to express a fluorescent gene, are sold as “glofish” in pet stores. Lyons is doing something similar, but his fish express effects of modified carboxypeptidases rather than fluorescence.

At the moment, he’s having some problems with his fish. Every morning, he puts them into a tank with a slotted bottom to separate out their eggs. Zebrafish will eat their eggs if they aren’t removed from the tank just after birth, and Lyons’ fish are managing to get through the slots and eat all the embryos. “I need a finer filter,” he says ruefully, looking at the complacent little cannibals.

Once the lab is up and running, Lyons can begin investigating physical expressions of mutated carboxypeptidase. In the meantime, he’s doing his experiments on his cell lines. A cell line is a group of cells that “have been immortalized—in theory,” says Lyons. His cells, all genetically identical, can be stored indefinitely and reproduced in petri dishes. For some kinds of genetic research, “it’s easier to look at a single cell type in a dish rather than a whole organism,” he says.

The open-endedness of his research has always excited Lyons. “There’s no end to the ideas. I have seemingly limitless ideas of things we could do with the cell-culture system, and transgenic zebrafish available on the market, but there is sadly an end to the money and hands to pursue it,” he says. Thankfully, Andrews is able to help with some of that: Lyons has been assisted by several biology students over the past year, and is optimistic about Andrews’ lab capabilities. “The biology department is set up really well for this kind of research,” he says. “We can pretty easily support the research I do—not all of it requires fancy equipment, and the high-tech stuff is often outsourced to larger laboratories.”

Lyons’ research has also earned him funding from several sources, including the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the National Institute of Health, and the neuroscience nonprofit The Grass Foundation.
children’s books and three humorous “trade books” envision the great artists—and some lesser-known ones like Artemesia Gentileschi and Giotto—on a much more relatable scale. Little Seurat, for example, got measles and was forever fascinated with spots; Picasso goes to Chicago and everything looks slightly twisted.

His most recent series, “Poetic Licenses,” revisits a concept from 30 years ago and expands on it in humorous ways. In the 1980s, he created “Artist Licenses,” a series of vanity plates for artists, that display their signature style—Christo’s was wrapped in plastic; Dali’s plate half-melted; Pollock’s covered in paint splatters. They were a hit when exhibited in New York. Thirty years later, he had some leftover materials and was thinking about vanity license plates. They’re a very consciously public medium, and so are used to say funny or semi-philosophical things about their drivers. Artists, too, are known for saying things as well as making them, and a quick search on the Internet will give you pages of artist quips, many of them wry or witty. Constantine began using the license plates to spell out famous and funny quotes, and quickly had a series of about 45 quotes.

Many of the quotes he uses are from modern artists—Picasso is a particular favorite of his, famous for saying things like “Good artists borrow; great artists steal” and “When I haven’t any blue I use red.” Andy Warhol has contributed to the series as well—his famous statement “In the future, everybody will be world-famous for 15 minutes” fits rather too well with the idea of vanity plates.

To create the pieces, Constantine uses a vacuum-former to melt plastic over a series of moveable letters and numbers, reminiscent of the Gutenberg printing presses. He then paints the plates and proceeds to make them look used, painting rust on them, distressing or melting them, and even adding bullet holes—which he quickly notes “aren’t real.”

The plates are incredibly realistic—they fool many of Constantine’s viewers at first glance. “The most common question I get is, ‘Where did you get all these plates?’ I usually say, ‘I have friends all over the world that send them to me,’” he jokes. He then goes on to explain that he handcrafts each one, which usually clears up the confusion and leaves the viewer with a greater appreciation for the pieces.

After creating the artist quotes, Constantine moved on to famous quips from movies: “Badges? We don’t need no stinkin’ badges.” The vanity plates of film, the quotes he’s chosen stick in our minds and sneak into our conversation. Most recently, he’s begun a license-plate series of quotes about cars, including this gem from Henry Youngman: “I drive my wife everywhere but she keeps finding her way back.”

“I have more ideas than I have time to create them,” he says. His many works over the years have been about seeing “old” art in new ways. He regularly exhibits in New York City and Chicago, and is an active participant in local art exhibitions and contests. “My motto has been never to say no to myself—I’ll let someone else do that. I’ve gotten plenty of noes, but I’ve also gotten some yeses.”

And whether or not he places or gets arrested at ArtPrize, Constantine loves the art awareness that the annual citywide exhibition generates. During the three-week exhibition, people from all over wander around the city, peek into museums and other venues, and have opinions about art. Last year, he waited two hours in line to see the prizewinner. “I was standing in line with Mr. and Mrs. Joe Blow in bib overalls, and they were curious—they’d probably never been to the museum before.” The exhibitions draw huge crowds, and get comprehensive coverage in local media.

He’s currently searching for inspiration for future projects. “I kind of like this ransom note thing,” he says without a hint of a smile, revealing nothing about any questionable possible career intentions.

If you want to see this year’s ArtPrize submission before it’s impounded as evidence, Constantine’s piece will hang in the Ford Museum in Grand Rapids. ArtPrize runs from September 18 to October 6, 2013. A full listing of events and participating locations is available at www.artprize.org.