A Legacy Of Art

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By Carmen Howard

When visitors come to UICOMP, they are typically looking for a particular office, a specific classroom, or the library. Imagine their surprise when they find a museum of fine art!

Thanks to the generosity of donors and friends, UICOMP and the Library of the Health Sciences are home to a wealth of beautiful sculptures, paintings, drawings, and more.

Take The Tour

Here are just a few of the many interesting pieces housed in UICOMP’s main campus building:

"Seated Woman" by Oreste Dequel is located outside of Administrative Affairs on the lower level. This figure-study drawing was done in preparation for a sculpture. The drawing was done in watercolor and ink on paper. Dequel is Yugoslavian born, but is best-known as an Italian sculptor. Artist Michel Gaudet wrote, "The drawings are sketched, traced following an initial outline, enlivened by a few etches, then discreetly colored in natural tones, dominated by the shades of the earth." This piece was donated by Dr. and Mrs. William Cooley in 1979.
Art (top left to bottom):

"The U of I Trustees Caduceus"
by John Riedell

"Seated Woman"
by Oreste Dequel

"Eclipse"
by Italo Valenti
On display outside of the Regional Dean's Office are three original drawings by John Riedell, the political cartoonist. Throughout the 1970s, Riedell created a number of drawings for the Peoria Journal Star to accompany articles about the original Peoria School of Medicine. The first drawing was entitled "Tree of Life" and was published in 1970. The original drawing of "Tree of Life," along with another original drawing, "Beginning to Bear" (published in 1971), were donated to the College of Medicine in 2008 by Elena Cotsonas, daughter of Dr. Nicholas J. Cotsonas Jr., UICOMP's first Dean. One additional original, "The U of I Trustees Caduceus" (published in 1973), was discovered in Dean Cotsonas' newspaper clipping files.

"Eclipse" by Italo Valenti is a signed and numbered lithographic print. UICOMP's "Eclipse," number 52 in a run of only 110 prints, was donated in 1979 by Dr. & Mrs. William Cooley. In a Peoria School of Medicine News article from July of 1979, Valenti was called a modern abstractionist. ArtOfThePrint.com, an online art gallery, states that Valenti was pushed to the forefront of avant-garde art in the 1960s and 1970s and that his lithographs "are viewed as crucial to the development of abstract expressionist art of the period." This lithograph is on display outside of Room A109.

Another piece on display outside of A109 and also donated in 1979 by Dr. and Mrs. Cooley is "Magic Tarsia" by Giuseppe Santomaso. This signed and dated etching and relief print was created in 1970 and is number 170 of 210 prints created. A close examination of the piece allows the viewer to see the relief which appears as raised white lines. Santomaso is known primarily for his painting, but he also worked in other media, such as collage and printmaking. In Modern Painting Contemporary Trends, Nello Ponente says "...what Santomaso ultimately gives us is the image of light, of luminous space ..."

In 1997, Dr. Brian Curtis generously presented the Library of the Health Sciences with two lithographs created by Adrien Barrère, a Parisian caricaturist who had studied medicine but never practiced. These lithographs are the first two in a four-part series produced in the first part of the 20th century and were popular for their humorous characterization of the medical faculty in Paris. The lithographs can be viewed outside of the library's study rooms.

Also on display in the Library is "Torso," a wooden sculpture of the pregnant form by a local artist, Van Wilkerson. The announcement in the Peoria School of Medicine Newsletter (October of 1977) reads, ""Torso," a sculpture in solid walnut, has been placed in the library through the courtesy of its owners, Dr. & Mrs. William Cooley of Peoria. Carved from two pieces of laminated native black walnut, the figure of a pregnant woman is based..."
on an illustration in a medical textbook belonging to Dr. Cooley. Sculptor of the work is Van Wilkerson of Peoria, formerly a student of Nita Sunderland at Bradley University. Mr. Wilkerson completed it over a period of three weeks in 1971...The top of the base on which the 68-inch sculpture rests is a slab of stone from a chemistry lab at the old Bradley Hall that was destroyed by fire in the 1960s.*

"Earthly Treasures" and "Two-Part Harmony" are mixed media watercolors by R.R. Benda. Born in 1934, Benda is an Illinois artist who studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and was a member of Chicago-area art groups, including the North Shore Art League. He is known for working in acrylics and collage. "Earthly Treasures" is on display in Room A223, and "Two Part Harmony" is in Room A226-B.

"GOX II 1975," the large metal sculpture which stood outside the main campus building entrance until the recent construction project began (it will be relocated to the west end of campus), was donated by Russell B. Nelson and the L.R. Nelson Trust in 1977. Ernest Trova was born, lived, and worked in St. Louis, Missouri. He had no formal training in art, but in 1947 at the age of 20, his mixed media work "Roman Boy" received national publicity in a full-page piece in Life magazine. However, he is best-known for his "Falling Man" icon, which he reproduced and refined in a variety of media.

Throughout his artistic career, Trova worked in series by reworking and redefining concepts and images from piece to piece. He compared the process to improvisational jazz. Besides "Falling Man" he has also produced other series, some of which are the "Profile Cantos," "Abbreviations," and "GOX," which stands for "Geometric Exercises." The "GOX" sculptures were initially modeled in wood in a variety of sizes. Although hundreds of "GOX" models exist, only a few large public sculptures in steel or stainless steel were actually created, many of which are on display in the Laumeier Sculpture Park in St. Louis, Missouri.

More To See

In addition to the pieces highlighted in Pathways, other fine art is on display at UICOMP, including a woodcut and a pen-and-ink stipple drawing. A wealth of reprints, posters, and textile prints are also available for viewing throughout the main campus building.

So, the next time you feel like a trip to the art museum, come visit the College of Medicine! •