

Arts

Charles Steckler adds dimension to perspective

By Emily Kern · Sep 22, 2016

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Perspective is a facet of all art forms that helps to tell a story. We see through a protagonist's eyes, listen to the songwriter's ballad, empathize with the poet's view of the world, and interpret an artist's work.

In the "Contrary To What Sometimes Happens" exhibit, Professor of Theater and Resident Scenic Designer, Charles Steckler, who specializes in dioramas and collages, turns the traditional meaning of perspective on its head. Instead of creating a work of art based on a story, he does the contrary.

Steckler forages for materials that pique his interest, meaning anything is fair game. Whether it's an old can of soda from the 1970s or a foreign travel book, Steckler finds a way to reinvent any object's purpose and meaning. He then goes on to weave a story from the unique threads his materials offer.

This unconventional approach does not hinder Steckler in the slightest. In fact, it allows him to exercise his imagination when it comes to formulating something out of a myriad of objects that seem to have no relation to one another. "I love to invent places," proclaims Steckler.

The passion and intrigue he possesses brings out the most in his art by adding whimsical and sometimes eerie elements that a more conventional approach might not have conceived.

Another unique aspect of Steckler's work is how he creates his own dimension. In his artwork, the settings and subjects are placed within a depression Steckler constructs himself. He adds a decorative border around the edges, giving the impression of a staged performance. The combination of the 3-D objects being treated in 2-D space allows viewers the perspective of an audience member while simultaneously maintaining their own unique perspective.

One such example is named "Invisible City," a 3-D collage comprised of xeroxed copies of books and cardboard. The title was derived from a book of the same name, a fable about Marco Polo.

The characters, amongst other elements, were taken from an old Italian tourist book. Naturally, the "Invisible City" would emulate centuries-old Italian vibes. "The borders around the edges take advantage of the mathematics of linear perspective, which comes from the Italian Renaissance," Steckler explained. "That's what gives this particular piece the feeling of a theatrical performance," a theme that is present through most of the exhibit.

All in all, "Contrary To What Sometimes Happens" is not only an ode to the late German artist, Kurt Schwitters, but also a new, innovative take on Schwitters' style. Schwitters is most known for creating "Merzbau," a sculpture that combines interior design with 3-D collages.

Steckler one-ups Schwitters by incorporating storytelling in combination with his keen eye for stage and scenic design. Steckler credits his years of experience with setting up stages for plays and musicals for a good portion of his artistic style.

Steckler now follows his own mantra, "Merzbauhaus," a word derived from "Merzbau" and Bauhaus, a German art school that was renowned for its approach to teaching the arts. A sign can be found on the window of his workspace in the Nott Memorial with the hybrid word printed in bold, accompanied by small handwriting that says "continuous project altered daily."

Charles Steckler's office can be found in Yulman Theater. He can occasionally be found on the second floor of the Nott Memorial creating more stories and settings as well as experimenting with new materials.

For those interested in meeting the artist, he is on site: Wednesday, October 26, 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.; Tuesday, November 15; 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

The Charles Steckler exhibit is open for public viewing from now until December 11, 2016.