

# EDITORIAL



The UHCLIDIAN is a homonym for Euclidian – a word play using the name of the famous Greek mathematician Euclid and the university's acronym, UHCL.

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The UHCLIDIAN is a public forum and will print letters to the editor subject to the following: letters must be no longer than 500 words. Where necessary, letters will be edited for grammar, spelling and style requirements. Letters must be signed and include the writer's full name, address and phone number. The editors reserve the right to refuse letters, announcements and contributed articles deemed libelous.

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## DREAMS FOR SALE: Student art provides golden opportunity

When asked what they want to be when they grow up, most young children answer with uncanny predictability. Firefighter, police officer, teacher and astronaut are all popular answers.

However, every so often one comes across a different class of dreamer who yearns to become a painter, sculptor, or in the worst cases, a comic-book artist. Armed with a combination of Crayons, Play-Doh and an unlimited imagination, these visionaries create original masterpieces that are showcased daily on family refrigerators in kitchens across the world.

For most, these childhood fantasies are eventually lost somewhere along the way to the harsh practicality required by adulthood; too often, the aspiring 8-year-old Michelangelos of yesterday become the unfulfilled accountants of today.

Unfortunately, there is a sad truth behind the cliché regarding "starving artists."

Many people who earn art-related degrees will never earn a living in the fields for which they have dedicated so much time and effort. One need only interview a cross-section of any Starbucks or Kinko's staff to verify this observation.

In light of these facts, some might question why any reasonable person would ever pursue a career in art when the odds are so stacked against them. Though individual reasons may vary, many artists live for the moment when their work touches someone,

anyone, in a way that cannot be fully expressed by words alone.

To experience such a moment, beginning artists must first have a chance to display their works in open venues where others might discover their talent. This is no easy task. Without the reputation that precedes famous artists, even the most talented art students have an extremely difficult time acquiring their first public commission.

Recently, UH-Clear Lake received a rare opportunity to help its art students complete this critical first step in a successful art career.

When the university built the new Student Services and Classroom Building, 1 percent of the total construction costs were set aside to purchase public arts for the new structure. A committee, named the Art Acquisition Advisory Board, was created to decide how best to spend these funds.

Since many of the board members had never commissioned public artwork, they decided to model their selection process after the systems used by large public entities such as corporations and airports.

Using these procedures as guides, the committee contacted several well-known artists and asked them to submit proposals that fit within the university's budget. These proposals consisted of multiple steps in which the prospective artists had to submit items such as sketches of the planned piece, written statements about the meaning of the

artist's work, and the overall costs of the completed projects.

There are several problems inherent to such a selection process.

First, committee members could never be 100 percent certain how a final piece would actually appear since sketches created during the proposal process often differ from the final project. Second, art works created under such provisions, by their very nature, are often prohibitively expensive.

For example, the first and only work purchased by the Art Acquisition Advisory Board, the glass mosaic entitled "Consilience," cost approximately \$120,000 to complete. While not unusual for such a large, unique piece, the high price tag sacrificed more than half the total art fund, leaving only \$86,657 to purchase additional works.

Currently, the committee plans to use the same selection process to acquire additional pieces for the Student Services and Classroom Building. It is understandable why the committee might continue to use such a proven method, but there may be another answer that could simultaneously benefit both the university and the talented art students who attend it.

For example, the board could spend the remaining funds on artwork that was created by students while they attended various courses available on campus. Such an arrangement has several advantages over the existing selection method.

In the current proposal process, potential artists submit sketches and ideas that may or may not resemble the final product. This risk could be avoided by purchasing student works, since all pieces could be their completed form before purchase. Once the guesswork of the selection process is eliminated, the board could be certain all purchased artwork met their quality standards.

In addition, student works are far more affordable than professionally commissioned works. As such, more pieces could be procured for less money; instead of one or two works, the committee could easily obtain 20 to 30 pieces of quality art for the same cost.

Finally, and most importantly, by choosing to purchase art from its students, the university would be playing a crucial role in giving many of its students the exposure that is so critical to fledgling artists. By displaying exceptional student works throughout the building, the school could highlight the abilities of its talented student body while simultaneously providing examples of what could be learned while attending classes at the university.

In short, the school would be able to put its money where its mouth is.

THAT'S LIFE by M. Twohy

