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Behind the scenes

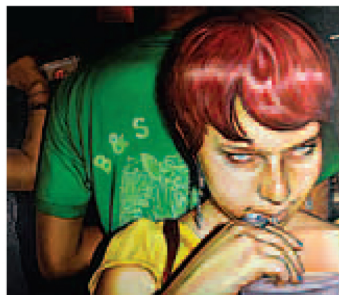
Facilities and operations builds the pathways and keeps them plowed

Art and design technicians display their artistic side at exhibit

Michael Davies-Venn

A new exhibition at the U of A celebrates some of Edmonton's most talented artists—who also happen to be technicians helping to provide top-notch arts education for students.

The show at FAB Gallery, *Transitions: Work by Technical Staff From the Department of Art and Design*, highlights works by studio technicians who work to ensure safety in the university's art studios, keep equipment and facilities running smoothly, and provide moral support to students who have come from around the world to study visual fundamentals, painting,



Sipper (2009) by Campbell Wallace.

printmaking, sculpture, drawing and intermedia, industrial design and visual communication design.

The multimedia exhibition showcases a diverse collection of pieces reflecting a range of issues, from city landscapes to sociopolitical issues in rural China. But despite that diversity, there's a consistency the technicians maintain at the university.

"The classes, the projects and the instructors change," says Ken Horne, industrial design technician. "But I'm still the guy

sitting downstairs on my bench, helping students and sharing ideas. That kind of continuity is refreshing for students."

Until last year, Horne was a junior member among the 13 technicians, despite having been at the U of A since 1997. "I've been here 15 years and I have a great beard, but I was still the kid," he said.

Dick Der, a painting technician who came to the university more than 30 years ago, says he gets inspiration from students' passion.

"We were at the Tate Museum in London to see an exhibition by Sir Anthony Caro. And I turned around and saw one of the students sitting on the floor—she was crying, she was so moved by the sculptures," Der said.

Der says such experiences and facilities at the U of A set the university apart from other art schools. "I've visited some art schools, even in New York, to see their studios. And by far our facilities here are superior," he says. "For example, at some schools, students don't have studio space."

Along with the facilities, the U of A department's mix of practical and theoretical approaches provide more than just arts education for students, Horne says. "It teaches them that they can change the world and their environment.

"If you have to give your print to someone else to make it happen, you realize you can't finish your job by yourself. But to be able to take a 20-foot length of steel rod, bend and weld it, put a cushion on it and get yourself a chair that you can use for the rest of your life—and you do all of those processes yourself—I think that changes a person. That's quality of education."

Printmaking technician Marc Seigner, who came to Edmonton 30 years ago, says he and his U of A colleagues have also contributed to the quality of the city's thriving arts scene.



Snaptop Chinatown #51 (2012) by Dick Der.

"A former colleague and I noticed that when the students finish the program, they leave the city. We thought, there needs to be an arts community beyond the campus," he recalled. "So we decided to start a print society, and we developed this idea that's been going on for 30 years now, the Society of Northern Alberta Print-Artists." Der is involved with a similar group, the Edmonton Contemporary Artists' Society.

Art and design professor Maria Whiteman, the show's curator, notes the importance of the technicians' work. "The daily work carried out by these technicians is invaluable. Amongst the most celebrated and talented artists working in Edmonton, they carry on their art practice even as they conduct workshops, run an art supply store, manage woodshops and printing presses, and pass along their skills, knowledge and techniques."

Transitions runs until Dec. 1 at the FAB Gallery. ■