

What's past is prologue

Dan Webb and Anne Connell find inspiration in bygone times

By D. K. ROW
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

For Dan Webb and Anne Connell, whose shows are now on view at Marylhurst University's Art Gym, the past, more than the present, is the main inspiration behind their fascinating artworks.

For Webb, it's the eternal longing for youth and childhood that is the specific topic of his exhibit, humorously titled "Ex-Cherubs." In this show of exquisite wood carvings, the central works are a group of carved busts of men who are meant to appear neither young nor old but seemingly frozen in an ageless netherworld. Indeed, sitting on the floor as they do with their smooth surfaces and pale ale coloring, the busts linger somewhere between haunting death masks and quasi-Cheshire-cat grins. There's a price for eternal youth, Webb seems to be saying, and it's lingering in this perpetual state of fantasy suspension that those of us in real time can view only with ironic humor.

In other works, as in a group of carved pastries that invoke Pop artist Claes Oldenburg, Webb adds yet another metamorphic layer to his homage to the banal splendors of adolescence. Pastries were one of the delights of childhood, right? As was sticking gobs of bubble gum underneath our school desks, which is given the full treatment in three oddly proportioned wood carved desks sitting next to one another with strudel-size mounds of masticated gum underneath.

One of Webb's other intentions is to show, both metaphorically and physically, the transformation involved in making artworks. In one corner of the gallery is a heap of residual sawdust from carvings, while in another corner is a pile of scrap wood. Both are evidentiary works, invoking both poetic impli-

REVIEW

*Works by Dan Webb
and Anne Connell*

Where: Art Gym at Marylhurst University, B.P. John Administration Building, one mile south of Lake Oswego on Oregon 43

Hours: Noon-4 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays

Admission: Free

Closes: Wednesday

cations and the arduous labor required in transforming blocks of wood into splendid objects.

But, most of all, they bring viewers back to Webb's initial point, which is rarely lost in this show. Sitting there like a pile of bones or lost detritus, with the sun's gold rays streaming through the gallery windows, they remind us that time never ends. What remains, after we expire and become handfuls of dust, are the dreams of our youth.

Showing with Webb in Gallery 2 is Anne Connell, a local painter who for the past decade has been making some of the most intriguing paintings in town. Pilfering images from Italian Renaissance

paintings and reconstituting them in artworks that are, in principle, collages, Connell is elaborately mining art's historical past to illuminate the present.

What she's saying, however, is ultimately a tad impenetrable, and perhaps intentionally so. You'll have to look beyond merely recognizing bits of Giovanni Bellini or Francesco del Cossa to deeply appreciate these paintings.

Through her exquisitely detailed heraldic patterns and Italian draperies, unusual plays on spatial perspective and other myriad conundrums, what Connell seems to be presenting, bit by bit, is a landscape of isolation, even emotional absence. Indeed, there's a luminous tranquillity to the images that also functions as a strangely eerie counterpoint to the richness of the imagery itself.

The paintings are great to look at, and for some viewers that may be enough. But Connell's paintings are conundrums that beg a deeper inquiry. And, at this point, that inquiry reveals a love and obsession with another time and place that has yet to be more fully animated to those of us in the near and present.