

ART Thanksgiving: Thinking about Joy

UNVEILING OF PAINTING SET FOR NOVEMBER 14, *by Kelly Love*



Foundation director Jill McDaniel and painter Sydney Yeager with the 2nd annual Thanksgiving Image.

What comes to mind when conjuring up images of Thanksgiving? Turkeys, pilgrims, football and visions of crowded malls, right? The Austin Fairchild Art Foundation wants to change all that.

Its 2nd Annual Thanksgiving Image – a 5 by 15-foot abstract painting by local artist Sydney Yeager – will be unveiled November 14 by Austin Mayor Gus Garcia and meets the goal of the foundation’s Thanksgiving Image Project to take the holiday focus away from food and shopping and direct it toward a visual symbol of gratitude.

The unveiling, set for the lobby of the Littlefield Building at Sixth Street and Congress Avenue, will include a dedication by Garcia and a discussion of the image by Dana Friis-Hansen, director of the Austin Museum of Art. Members of the City Council and State Legislature also will be on hand. The painting will hang in a window of downtown’s Scarbrough Building through January and be reproduced as posters and note cards.

The 2002 Thanksgiving Image, commissioned by the foundation to reflect the theme “Joy is the simplest form of gratitude,” is an energetic play of reds and greens, pale blues and yellows. The colors swirl and move together, creating both individual forms and a coalescent whole. The primary pattern is a red wave that flows through the center of the canvas. It is surrounded by paler forms, but the delineation between the colors is fluid and impermanent.

Yeager, a drawing and painting teacher at Austin Community College and the Art School at Laguna Gloria, hails from East Texas, where she spent her childhood, she says, “dreaming in art.” She moved to Austin to attend UT and has made it her home since.

Yeager’s work shows at D Berman gallery in Austin and McMurtrey Gallery in Houston. A 10-year retrospective of her work (including the Thanksgiving Image), “Little Mysteries,” will travel the state and return to Austin’s Texas Fine Arts Association next November.

She speaks glowingly of the

foundation. “You don’t run into this kind of generosity in the arts that often,” she says.

The Austin Fairchild Art Foundation was born in 1984 when executive director Jill McDaniel and her husband were mired in the process of donating art to a museum and realized the need for donator-to-museum facilitation.

They started the foundation and soon found themselves sponsoring more ambitious art projects. While the foundation remains committed to donation facilitation, much of its time is devoted to endeavors such as the Thanksgiving Image Project, each with the theme of peace and understanding through contemporary art.

The Thanksgiving Image Project was conceived years ago, but it was the move of the foundation’s offices from Dallas to Austin that allowed it to take shape. Directors of the Austin Museum of Art and the Texas Fine Arts Association helped McDaniel with the selection of artists for the project.

“The art community here has been so receptive,” McDaniel says. “It was that support that made this project possible.”

Austin’s nonprofit community also has shown overwhelming response. SafePlace is using the 2001 image as its holiday card this year. Meals on Wheels will distribute Thanksgiving Image cards with handwritten messages from schoolchildren to meal recipients. Habitat for Humanity will give a poster of the Thanksgiving Image to each recipient of a Habitat home in Austin.

McDaniel hopes such distribution will help to spread the word that Thanksgiving is more than just turkey and dressing.