

LIFESTYLE

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The whimsical world of Fred & Friends

“Fred and Friends” opened on Thursday in the Frank Arts Center gallery and will be open till the public until mid-February.

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How can anything influenced by Star Wars, Ultraman, the duality of nature and man, and Godzilla not be awesome? That’s right, it can’t. The show “Fred and Friends” features the artistic stylings of Fred Fleisher, the new art education professor here at Shepherd. In the previous week I had been eying the gallery with some curiosity, seeing only a singular massacred Care Bear through a hole in the covering. Many others must have shared my sentiment, for the Thursday night opening filled the Frank Arts Center gallery with a large and inquisitive crowd.

Before the opening Fleisher talked about his life and numerous artistic influences and the effect they have had on his work. During the talk, the audience learned many things about Fleisher, including the fact that he was an Army Ranger and his mission to make things in life more visible that may otherwise unnoticed. Growing up near Harrisburg, Pa. he elaborated on how his childhood memories and reactions to loss have impacted his work. He also introduced his “Friends”, group of artists from New York that collaborated with him on many of his pieces. He finds the group effort to be an important part to his artwork. “No matter where we live it’s meaningful to engage in a community of artists to help test ideas, discuss issues and to feed the ego and keep it check,” Fleisher said. Some of his collaborators were actually students, such as Sam Nelson, Zach Roberts, and Tim Everson.

After the talk, we continued to the gallery and confronted the creations of which he had spoken. In the midst of a chocolate fountain and a bowl of punch, usually one of the main attractions to the hungry attendee of a gallery opening, was a colorful array of numerous media-paintings, drawings, sculpture, photos, and video. And, instead of the audience being distant from the artwork, this exhibit was largely interactive! Televisions are hooked up to a racetrack model that could be controlled by the viewer and simulated racing. There is a video with Star Wars and Dune clips that contained scenes in which Fleisher had overdubbed himself into the movie between scenes, standing in front of a green screen. Whacking into the feet of the entranced crowd, a pink remote-controlled zebra sped about the room.

I was part of an instant that sums up the utter coolness of not only the exhibits, but of the artists themselves. While following Fleisher about the room and looking for a good photo opportunity, my shoulder brushed a piece that consisted of a Jesus figurine sitting on a low-hanging cloud, suspended from the ceiling. Before I realized it, Jesus fell from his cloud and shattered into pieces on the floor. Utterly embarrassed and thoroughly expecting to be kicked out or have to pay for the work, I simply stared from the floor to Fleisher, then back to the floor, not knowing what to say. He reacted simply and quickly, picking up the pieces, borrowing some duct tape, and taping the savior back together saying, “Hey, it’s better this way! We just collaborated!” After such a clumsy icebreaker, I found it easy to meet and talk to Fred and his cohorts, asking them what they wanted said about their work. One such crony, Matt Jones, responded, “This is pretty much the best show ever. Really. And, add that we are all terribly attractive.”

No show I have ever been to has provided such a laid-back atmosphere that runs utterly perpendicular to the stuffy art world of museums which crosses most of your minds when you hear “art opening”. “Fred and Friends” floored me completely, displaying fun and interesting art that wasn’t laced with (and didn’t require) hard-to-fathom themes or meanings that make most audiences squirm. As Junior Jacob Lynn put it, “It is refreshing to see one of the faculty doing art for

the sake of art...no required conception. This meets aesthetics without any required deep meaning." I, for one, would heartily enjoy seeing more shows like this one and am looking forward to seeing more of Fred's work in the future. I would like another chance to collaborate.