

Supply and Demand in the Arts

Universities are the leading producers of artists of all kinds in America. But where is an artist without an audience?

by Douglas Dempster, Senior Associate Dean of Fine Arts

It's a remarkable fact that the single strongest — in fact, overwhelmingly strongest — predictor of an adult's involvement with the arts, either as a consumer or practitioner, is not childhood exposure to the arts or arts activities; it's not affluence; it's not heritage. It is formal educational attainment and the exposure to the arts and culture that normally comes with that education.

There is little doubt that we are oversupplying society with aspiring artists and performers, but we should also be doing more to build demand by insuring that the arts are part of the educational programs of non-arts majors. At The University of Texas, with a total enrollment of nearly 50,000 students, the demand for art courses, especially studio and performance-based courses, is huge. The College of Fine Arts teaches more than half of all student credit hours earned in our curriculum to non-art majors, the highest ratio of all the colleges in the University. Even at that, we don't begin to meet the demand, and when we do, it is primarily through large lecture sections in art appreciation and history.

As we, and other schools, race to professionalize our curricula to the advantage of our majors, we struggle to rationalize curricular access for non-majors, whose use of faculty, equipment, and

facilities, in a very real sense, represents an opportunity cost for our majors. This is an impulse we must resist on pain of undermining, in the long run, the very demand that our professional graduates must count on for their future livelihoods. Arts schools must, in their

enrollments and curricular commitments, cultivate the future of demand for the arts with the same competitive single-mindedness as we bring to training future professional artists and performers.

Furthermore, we need to diversify our curricula to accommodate a wide range of non-traditional students interested in the arts both as a profession and as an avocation. Dancers, after their dancing careers decline, will return for a broader education. Professional musicians will discover an interest in or need for better business and administrative skills. Art teachers need "in service" educational opportunities that help them cope with the uncertain and changeable character of arts education in contemporary American schools. None of these are likely to be looking for a traditional bachelor's degree or even MFA program.

The artist training system in the United States is, without a doubt, both the largest, and by many measures, the most

successful system in the world. However, we must remain vigilant to both the virtues and perils carried along by the inertia of our own cultural and institutional traditions.

The arts were swept into colleges and universities during an explosively creative, reform-minded period in higher education during the 19th century. We should revive that spirit in our own day. Educational reform, purely for the sake of reform, shouldn't be a rallying cry for arts education in American universities; after all, one of the functions of university arts programs is to "conserve" and reinterpret the artistic traditions that define our culture. However, we can — and for the sake of our students, we must — reform our programs with an eye as much on the future of the culture in which our students will work and live, as on the past, in which we, as their teachers, enjoyed our own moment of success.

Longhorns take Manhattan

Four events in New York to spotlight UT's eminence in the fine arts

On December 18 and 19, the stars will align to allow no less than four showcases of UT fine arts talent in New York City.

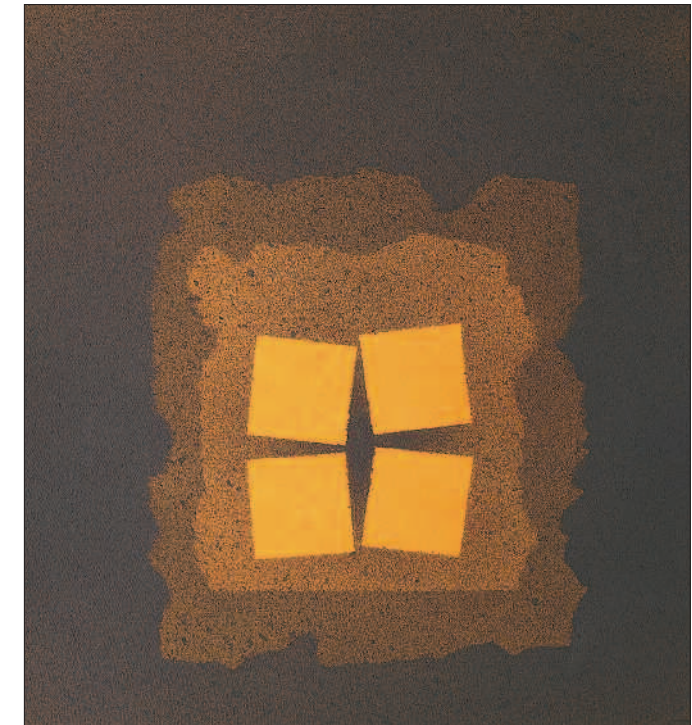
1. From 2-4 p.m., Dec. 18, reception for an art exhibit by UT faculty members will be on display at 511 Gallery, 529 W. 20th Street. The exhibit will be up from Dec. 8-Jan. 21.

2. On Monday, Dec. 19, from 12:30-3 p.m. there will be an academic symposium at Bruno Walter Auditorium in the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

3. Also that afternoon, Gerre Hancock, of the UT faculty, will be performing an organ concert at 4 p.m. at St. Thomas Church at Fifth Avenue and 54th Street.

4. Finally, the two-day extravaganza will wrap with the debut of the Texas Piano Quartet at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall. (The piano quartet is a string quartet plus one piano.) 7:30-9 p.m., Dec. 19.

For more details, see www.finearts.utexas.edu.



"Parchment 3," by Bill Wiman, watercolor, 34" x 29", one of the pieces to be on display in Manhattan this December