OU School of Art's 94th annual Students' Exhibition opens 7 p.m. today

• Exhibit continues through April 6 at Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art

By Adam Scott
entertainment editor

Though the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is providing the gallery space, the artwork being shown at this year's OU School of Art Students' Exhibition and even the logo for the exhibition itself are entirely the work of art students at the University of Oklahoma.

"The students do the logo in Typography II class," said Eric Anderson, professor of visual communications at the OU School of Art. "It's a student competition. All 18 compete and in this case they combined ideas from three people to kind of come up with this."

Anderson said the primary designer of this year's logo was Melinda Hawkins, a visual communications junior from Norman.

Anderson said it was "about the 17th year" students had done the logo for the exhibition, "so it's a very important event here for the graphic design students to do this logo."

"It is earlier than it has been the past few years," said Kristal J. Hamm, information director for the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, of the timing of this year's exhibition, which opens with tonight's reception and features works by graduate and undergraduate students.

"We have several different openings," Hamm said in reference to the museum's packed schedule of exhibits opening this spring, "so this was the best time to have this one and really give them the focus that they need."

Hamm said this year, 58 student artists have submitted 89 pieces among the 36 categories for the competition.

A display of student works ranging from traditional to cutting-edge media, the School of Art Students' exhibition publicly showcases the talent and artwork produced by the students at the OU School of Art throughout the school year, said Mary Jo Watson, director of the OU School of Art and Art History. The exhibition also gives young artists the experience of submitting works to a juried exhibition in a professional museum setting.

The opening, which is free and open to the public, is 7 to 9 p.m. today in the museum's Nancy Johnston Records Gallery on the museum's lower level. Live music, pizza and other refreshments will be served.

"We have a jazz quartet — they don't actually have a name — but we will have a little bit of live music and we'll have pizza and soft drinks and stuff for the kids," Hamm said.

"As always, it's open to the public."

Numerous awards, given to students for the finest works in a variety of categories, will be announced at 8 p.m. The awards this year total more than $7,000, and one work will be selected for the T.G. Mays Purchase Award. This work is selected by the museum staff and the juror.

"The museum will actually purchase the piece — it's the thousand-dollar gift," Hamm said of the Purchase Award, "and then it will become part of our permanent collection here at the museum. It's a really neat thing. We've been doing that for a long time."

Aaron W. Jones, arts education director for the Oklahoma Arts Council of Art, was hard at work looking over the pieces Wednesday, the juror for this year's award-winning student works, earned his master of arts degree in art history from OU in 2001.

"This show that OU has, their student show, is just this fantastic opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students," Jones said of the exhibition.

"They have this really wonderful opportunity to just have all of the art be exhibited and to have certain jurors come in and evaluate based on aesthetic as well as the process as well as the media ... it's not just categorized like you would expect others (to be) and I think that's what separates OU from a lot of others. That makes my job much more difficult in that the criteria then has to go beyond just the media or the process or representation or statement."

"So that's kind of where I am ... There are of course designated certain types of genres or disciplines, such as ceramics and sculpture, so those are pretty easy, but the rest, you kind of have to look at."

Continuing this year is the inclusion of three undergraduate artists' statements next to each of the works on display to add context, a feature started at last year's exhibition. Jones expressed his gratitude for the artists' statements.

"The most wonderful component that they've now included in these recent years has been students' artists' statements," he said.

"That sheds a lot of light, for a juror to also see the maturity of the individual, how they see themselves, their contribution to not only that particular discipline or genre but to society as an artist themselves. So that helps me in my decision-making."

With works done in media including paintings, ceramic, metal, wood, plaster, lithograph, paper, monograph, charcoal, digital print, pen and ink serigraphy, screenprint, mixed media and more, Jones said it was a great exercise into consideration into his decisions.

One of the more unusual visual choices for a piece on display at this year's exhibition is evident in "Proof of Purchase," composed of an arrangement of receipts accumulated by junior Riley Harmon.

"He made notes on every one of them as to what they were," Hamm said of the small, stream-of-consciousness-style notes, some angry, some sad, some reflective, some funny, scrawled on each of the dozens of receipts, which is kind of interesting. It's something I wouldn't have thought of."

The exhibition will remain on view through Sunday, April 6. A complete list of participants and works is available by visiting www.ou.edu/fjma/exhibitions.

Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday. The museum is closed on Monday. Museum admission is $5 for adults, $4 for seniors, $3 for children 6 to 17, $2 for OU faculty and staff, and free to OU students with valid ID. Museum Association members and children under 6. Admission is free to the public on Tuesdays.

For information or accommodations on the basis of disability, call the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at 325-4938.

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