COLA is Looking Brighter... Thanks to student artists
by Tara Martin

The exposed cinderblock and plain white walls in the basement of the College of Liberal Arts hardly offer an eye-pleasing atmosphere. Diane Forbes, a professor in the Language and Literature Department, can attest to that. After spending the last ten years in an office in the basement of COLA, Forbes decided to take action to make our building a bit more comfortable for its students.

Her vision was to use the blank walls as a canvas. Along with Zerbe Sodervick, the Coordinator of Extended Studies for the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences, Forbes designed an ongoing mural contest for students. "I like the idea of students helping in the creation of the campus environment," said Forbes.

Both students and faculty alike take an active role in the beautification project. In the developmental stages, faculty members from COLA submitted powerful quotations that they felt would represent the students. Student applicants are asked to choose a quote from the list and interpret its meaning in a detailed sketch. The faculty then makes the final decision based on aesthetics and relevance. Anyone is welcome to apply; the contest is not limited to CIAS or COLA. "We're totally flexible and open-minded to the ideas that come in," said Forbes.

It's this mindset that worked in Aaron Powers' favor. As a fourth-year Illustration major, Powers completed the first mural in one week over the summer. "I would spend 8 to 10 hours a day standing, climbing and painting the final image. All told, I believe I spent somewhere between 35 and 40 hours on the mural."

He chose to visually interpret a quote by musician Michael Franti, of the band Spearhead that reads, "You can bomb the world to pieces, but you can't bomb it into peace." His powerful imagery of a destroyed building, the Dove of Peace and swirling smoke, and the use of intense color provide an excellent representation of the current state of war and uncertainty in the United States and overseas.

"The reason I picked that particular quote was because it seemed very relevant at the time, and also because I had a few friends overseas fighting a war that didn't seem necessary to me," said Powers.

A second round of applicants has already submitted their sketches for the next mural. The plan is to have the entire middle section of the rounded walls covered--about ten murals--by the end of the year. "I think it's a great opportunity for student artists to get their work displayed and brighten it up down there!" said Forbes. The murals are guaranteed to last for five years, but after that, people's tastes and opinions are sure to change. The addition of benches in the basement is also an idea in the making. If added, the benches will serve as gallery seating to view the student artwork.

"Little by little," said Forbes, "hopefully, it will come together by the end of the year."

For more information about the contest, contact Diane Forbes at 475-6765 or e-mail her at dfjgs@rit.edu.

Kodak Attorney ... continued from front page

a student's perspective. "It gives the students an opportunity to discuss current issues and current research related to communication and meet professors who are addressing those issues," he said. "It also is an excellent opportunity to connect with faculty, staff, students, and professors."

Dr. Michael Mazanec, who will speak in January on interpersonal communication, also focused on the student perspective.

"It gives the students a chance to see professors speak about things they wouldn't normally talk about in class," he said. "It also gives them a chance to connect theory to practice."

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