



Photo by Kurt Ellison

The old and the new — Bob McDonald, Cruz County, displays two new additions to the museum's collection.

Art Museum attractive to donors

By CANDACE ATKINS

A Winslow Homer woodcut. An Edward Weston photograph. A William Dole collage — the list goes on.

Bob McDonald, director of The Art Museum of Santa Cruz County, must have a way with words, because he has made it so attractive to donate fine art to the Art Museum, the store-room is bulging with new acquisitions.

"I ask people for things," said McDonald. "There are certain people I know who are major collectors — they have been very generous."

People usually donate artworks, said McDonald, because they want to support the efforts of a museum or because they want the piece to be kept in a local collection. McDonald feels the Art Museum of Santa Cruz County is an excellent recipient; the collection is small enough that all donations are recognized.

"People want their donations to have impact — which they do here. In San Francisco,

works would just be swallowed up," he said.

McDonald is especially pleased that several donations are by major artists who worked in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Dean McHenry, Chancellor Emeritus at UCSC, donated an old oil painting by John Key that depicts the view of Monterey Bay from the present site of the UC campus. Another oil, "The Old Veteran," the famous cypress tree at Pt. Lobos, was completed in 1917 by artist Frank L. Heath. The work was donated by Doris Jenkyn.

"We're lucky to be able to fill in our collection with historical works. They are very, very scarce — they are not easily had," he said.

The majority of gifts to the Art Museum are by contemporary California artists, said McDonald. Many of the names are unknown to museum-goers, and some, McDonald himself has never heard of.

"Lots of names are unfamiliar, but that's the whole point," he said. "The Art

Museum is here to educate people in the community about their own art-historical past. People think we are (strictly) contemporary, but just by the nature of things, most of the donations are recent works. It is unlikely we will get any more offers for a work by Winslow Homer."

McDonald said some people object to the humor in 20th century art, and feel fine art must be reverent to be valuable. But humor can be found in some of the world's greatest art treasures; the Baldacchino at St. Peter's in Rome (1624-1633) — the very space over St. Peter's grave — contains little jokes by the artist Bernini.

There is a fake rosary carved in the wood visible only from the inside, little animals skirt the edges of the ostentatious decor and private jokes and symbols — bees and suns — for the Barberini family (the Pope, Urban VIII, was a Barberini) are found throughout the monument.

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Acquisitions

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"Some people, frankly, have trouble with humor in art," said McDonald. He added that the Art Museum is selective in accepting gifts, but said, "We're at the point where we're just beginning our collection. Anything puts us ahead."

Most gifts arrive toward the end of the year in time for the donor to claim it on income taxes. The Art Museum does not set a value on a work; that must be worked out between the benefactor and the IRS.

When an artwork arrives damaged, it is often sent to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Conservatory Center.

In the past, many artworks were ruined by sloppy conservation efforts or by restorers who simply repainted damaged areas. Today, McDonald said a good restoration job can be undone without damage to the work.

Just about all of the Art Museum collection is in good condition and could be shown today — if there was room. Since the last Art Museum Collections show just over a year ago, almost two complete shows could be arranged with recent acquisitions. Such exhibitions, he said, also entice potential donors.

"As our collection becomes known," he concluded. "It will attract other donations."