

GOOD TIMES

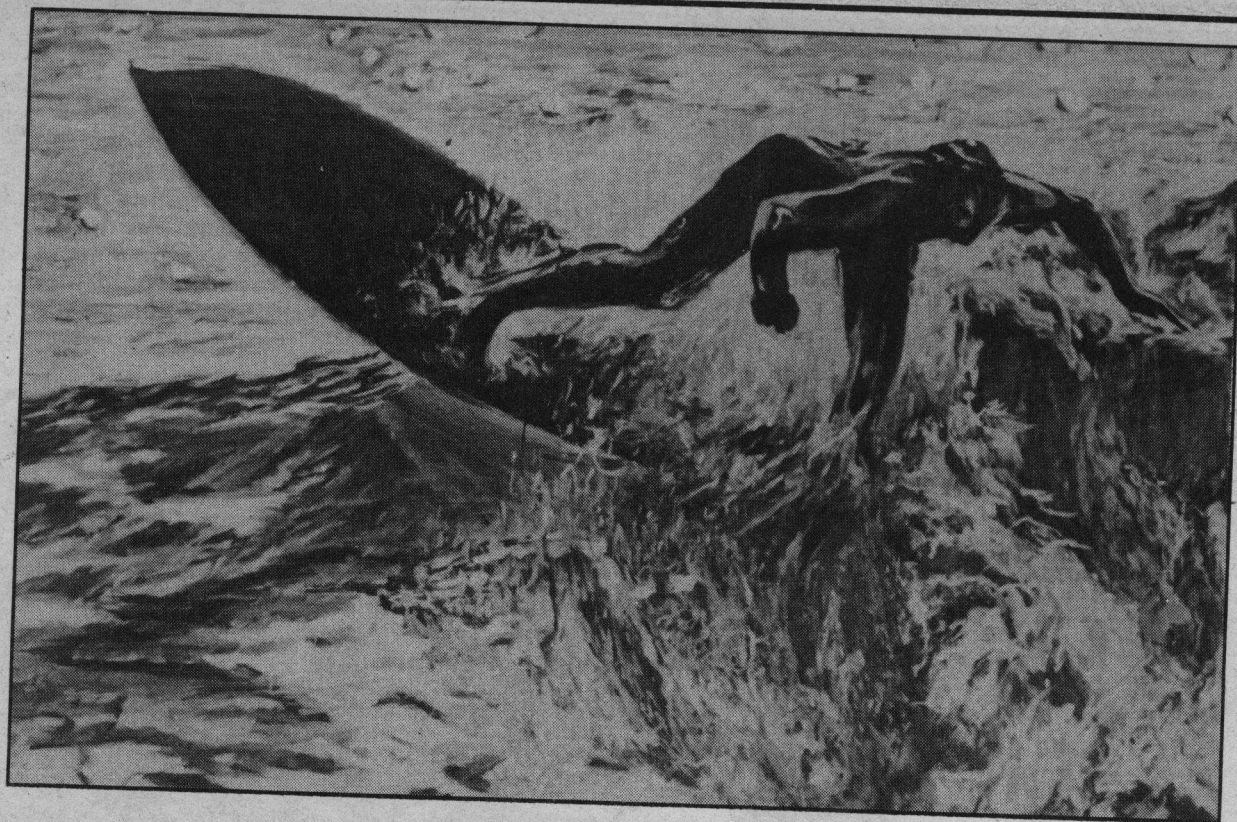
APRIL 26, 1979

Art & Artists - 1938-1979

THREE TOP SANTA CRUZ ARTISTS

B I L L F O R M A N

Santa Cruz is filled with artists, but when we set out to do a story on the best painters in town, we found that almost no one could agree on whom we should cover. We then narrowed our focus to artists who've exhibited and gained recognition beyond the limits of Santa Cruz, and chose three repeatedly cited by galleries, and other artists, and staff at UCSC and Cabrillo. The resulting profiles, show the quality of painters attracted to this area, and the kind of environment they find here as artists.



"Moon-lite Surfer" by Michael Wright

MICHAEL WRIGHT

Michael Wright has become something of an unifying factor in the Santa Cruz artistic community. The 35-year-old painter, who has exhibited in Seattle and throughout California, volunteers his time booking exhibits for the Santa Cruz Public Library gallery, along with wife Melinda, also an accomplished painter.

"A lot of the reason we wanted to do the library was to meet other artists in the community," Wright said, pointing to different sets among local artists. "There was a faculty at UCSC that were a particular age, and there were people in town who had just graduated, and I was kind of in the middle range, because of where my career was and what I was trying to do."

The volunteer job paid off, as evidenced by the unexpected visit during our interview of artist Phillip Hefferton, who entertained three-year old Marcelle while Wright was occupied.

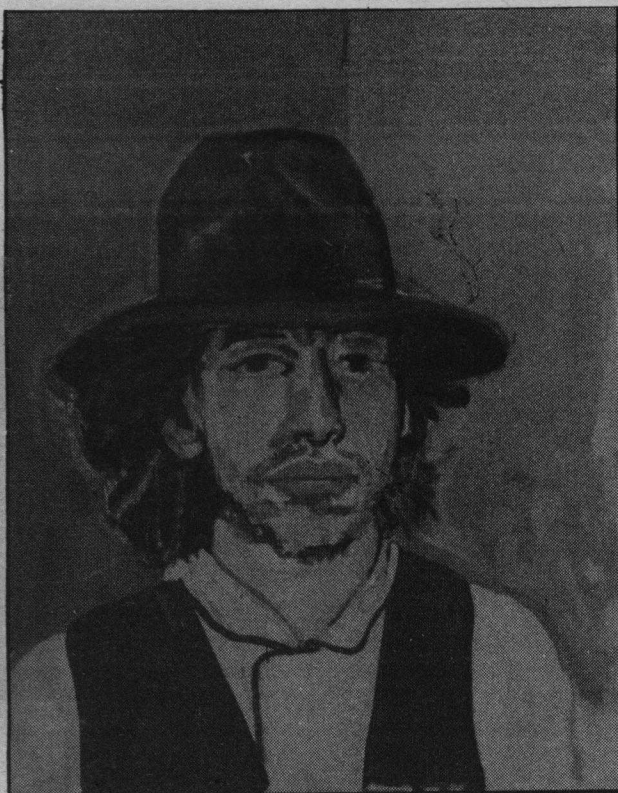
"Santa Cruz has its own particular artistic flavor,"

Wright continued. "There's a real European feel to it, a lot of people dealing with figures, as opposed to the more abstract and metaphysical."

"I've been a figurative painter for just about the whole time, although I experiment a lot," he said. "What I'm trying to do now is to get the two (figurative and abstract painting) into a space I feel comfortable with. That's why I'm dealing with surfers lately. I want to deal with the human figure in an abstract environment, namely the wave."

Wright has also built his own synthesizer, a sign of his taste for varied influences. "That was the great thing about Picasso," he commented. "He stole everybody's lines, swiped it here, swiped it there. Maybe saw somebody doing something good, he'd take it over here and try it out."

Wright has lived in Santa Cruz since 1972, and is excited about the town's potential in the arts. "I think Santa Cruz is very ripe for artistic development," he said. "I think there's gonna be a lot of resistance in some places, but you know the arts are really hard for anybody to put down."



"Portrait Of Danny Cueva" by Don Weygandt

DON WEYGANDT

Don Weygandt came to Santa Cruz in the summer of 1967 to accept a teaching post at the university. A painter who has lived and exhibited in New York, St. Louis and San Francisco, the 53-year-old Weygandt has a wife, Aldine, once his girlfriend at the age of 14, and two daughters, one a photographer and the other a music major at Cabrillo.

"Having moved down here from San Francisco," he said, "my paintings are now more open, more light, more color. My concerns are more in terms of structure, colors and spatial feel, and less anxious. They're more studied and contemplative." He continued, "I don't feel the pressure of the city. I'm not concerned about making it in the city or New York."

Weygandt is not optimistic about the local market for artists. "I think it's different to sell work here," he suggested, adding, "because there are few collectors and few people who have the knowledge and experience in paint to really sort it out. I think the more professional, serious, profound artist is not going to find too much of an audience here yet, outside of a few friends, collectors and people who know them."

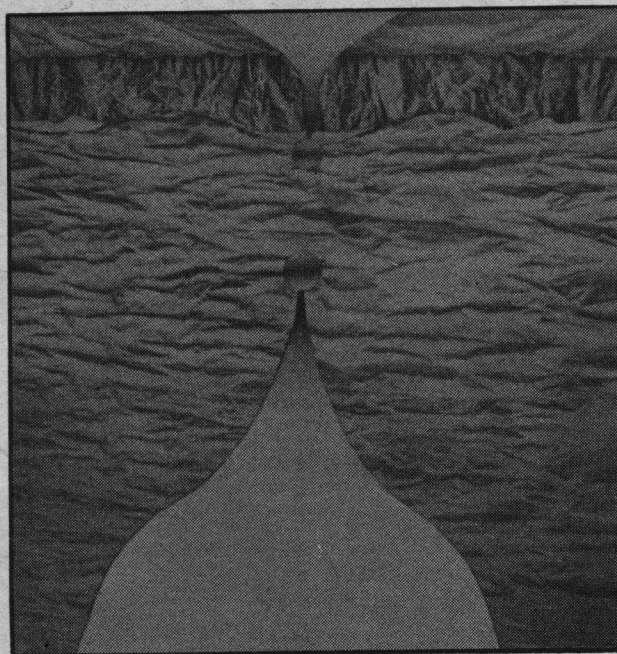
Though he's "skeptical" about the tourist market as art consumers, Weygandt finds another aspect of the

Boardwalk crowd appealing. "The activity of the kind of person that goes to the Boardwalk, that quality of life, can be a keen stimulant to certain kinds of artists, particularly young ones. I wish I were that much into portraits, or had the time to really paint some of those people, the carnival scenes, the romance and tragedy that circulate around it or within it."

The lack of time is a crucial factor several artists we spoke with have cited as the lack of a unified arts scene and Weygandt concurs. "Many of us tend to pull off and grab whatever little private time we have for our own work," Weygandt observed. "There is less

community than there could be. But there are pockets of all kinds of artists allied to one another, seeing one another and visiting one another's studios. Still, there are no strong focal points."

As an artist who deals in oil painting and does little abstract work, Weygandt finds himself happily out of step with artistic trends. "Ten years ago," he recalled, "a friend of mine in New York City wrote me a letter and said 'I feel like I'm practicing some ancient art form like Egyptian embalming.' But painting won't die. There is something very special about canvas and oil paint that is still very much alive."



"San Andreas #2" by Doug McClellan

DOUG MCCLELLAN

At 59, UCSC instructor and painter, Doug McClellan is the oldest of the artists we interviewed, and his work is the most abstract among them. His paintings have been shown throughout California and in New York, and his style is a bold fusion of geometry and geography. Bizarre landscapes of crumpled, painted, and flattened paper clash with ominously pure shapes. Other canvases are broken into 16 or 20 panels, exploring themes of weather and time cycles with fragmentary precision.

McClellan is a square-built, balding man who wears a

Greek fisherman's cap, a calm image that gives little clue to the intensity of his hallucinatory landscapes. His manner suggests an underlying stability: "My work is conservative, if you are a trend-conscious person," he remarked. "In terms of imagery, I think it's damned personal," he said. "I'm not looking at anybody else's work when I do it, and I really haven't come across anyone that happens to be doing the same thing. Not that I bust my neck to be novel or anything, but it's nice to know that you're doing something that probably only you can do."

Perhaps McClellan's long struggle to find his own direction has something to do with the uniqueness of his work. Born in Pasadena, McClellan went to LA to study industrial design at the Art Center school there. "It was at that time the only kind of art I could visualize being respectable enough for my parents not to flip out," recalled McClellan who now has a wife and two sons, one of whom, Wally, plays guitar for local new wave band JJ180. In the end, events helped McClellan to break away from parental influence. "I did it the hard way," he commented. "I went through World War II and got the GI Bill." Following the war, McClellan went to school in Colorado to study with an editorial cartoonist named Boardman Robinson, met his soon-to-be wife Marge, and took off for California, presumably for one summer. "A lot of my life has just been deferred decisions," McClellan commented; an intended move to New York was displaced by a succession of teaching posts, including the last nine years at UCSC.

Like all the artists interviewed, McClellan would like to see more of a sense of community among Santa Cruz artists. "There's no version of the Cedar Bar, that was in New York at one time, where all the artists would gather and compare notes, at least not that I know of. Even with all the artists here, I think it's possible that it is kind of an isolated place for an artist. You've got to carry a lot with you, and can't rely on what's going on around you. There may come a time when I feel the need to rub shoulders a lot more." •