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'Radicles' art show stirs emotions

Art League features alternatives

By CHRISTINE NEILSON
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WHAT is radical art? Does it blast through the boundaries of "conventional" art, or is it just graffiti?

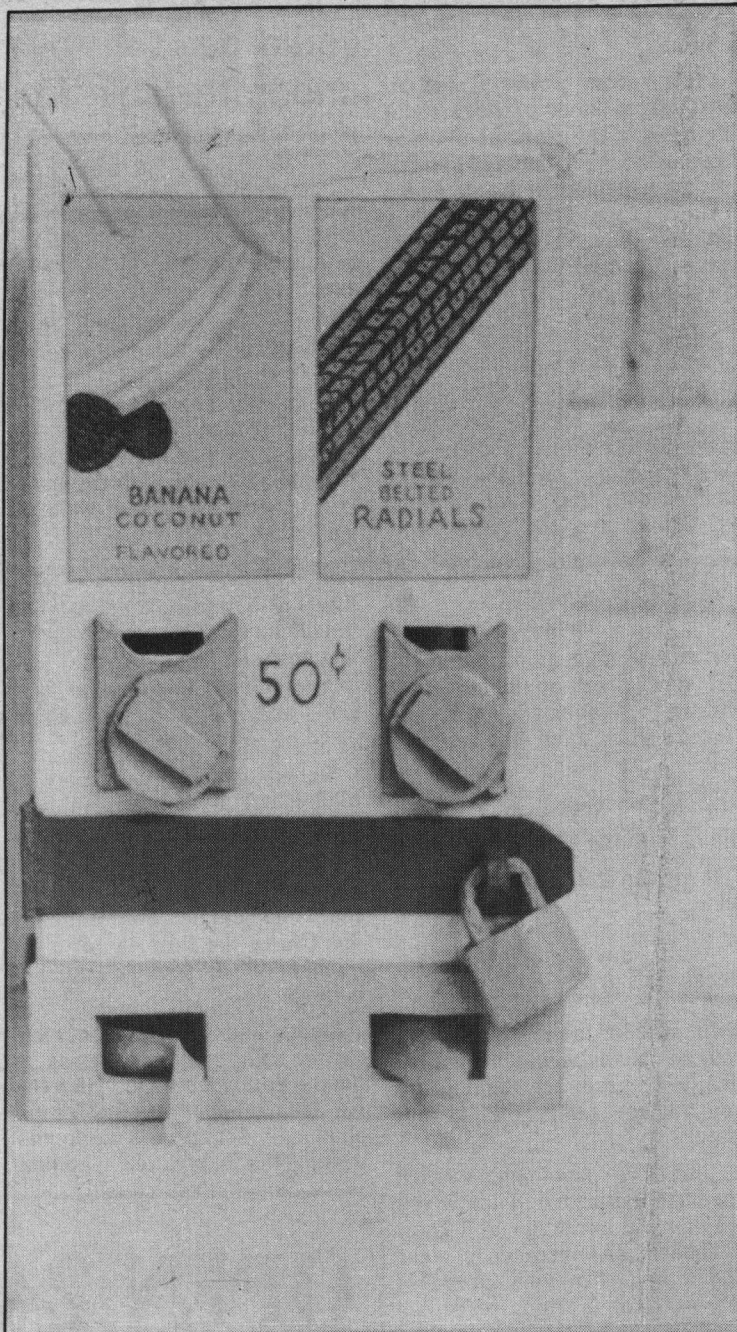
An answer, or at least a look at the question, is waiting at the Santa Cruz Art League's gallery at 526 Broadway.

This self-supporting collective for more than 500 artists is the setting this month for "Free Radicles Art Show," an exhibit that not only takes the liberty of making a play on the word "radical," but also attempts to influence or change attitudes and perceptions about the physical and mental environment.

Nine Monterey Bay artists — Hank Scott, Frank DeCosta, Arn Ghigliazza, Deborah Eddy, Clifford Kluge, Henry Humble, Susan Helgason, Michele Armitage and Kent Perry — are the radicals. Not only are they the featured artists, but they are also the people who gave the league's classroom a facelift and created a new gallery space. Now sunshine from skylights flows into a freshly painted room where this "extreme" art show runs through March 31.

Expect a highly charged reaction to this innovative show — it's guaranteed.

Under newly installed track lighting, Henry Humble's wit is displayed in his "World War 34" map painting and "Ms.



'Rubber Machine' by Henry Humble.

President," a portrait of a bespectacled woman with flying braids. But Humble doesn't stop with these two pieces. His mock condom dispenser with

"banana coconut" and "steel belted radials" choices leaves the viewer pondering where all this improvisation comes from. There is also the "Larval

Angel" bus display hanging above Humble's "The Joker," a big head lamp. Each piece is simple and precise while at the same time massaging social consciousness.

Artist Eddy gives the viewer clear answers to what has been in the path of what she sees as the runaway "growth machine" in Santa Cruz County.

Fields of wild flowers, knee-high grass and orchards are the

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victims of destruction in Eddy's artwork. She stirs up emotions with her oil paintings of natural beauty and collage of colored photographs depicting the evolution of a tranquil neighborhood into concrete curbs, fences and other structures.

Ghigliazza's pieces sit shoulder-to-shoulder with Helgason's sensual solarized black-and-white photographs of nudes. The photos bring viewers down to earth before they are tossed into the past by Ghigliazza's frivolous, political, 1960s-appearing shadow boxes. This collection of memorabilia is dotted with rhinestones, dice and photographs, all of which were collected at flea markets over the years. Across the room, a mixed-media sculpture takes Ghigliazza's work out of the shadow boxes and into the real world.

Masks and abstract oils by

One artist cut short by league

By CHRISTINE NEILSON
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ALTHOUGH THE Santa Cruz Art League gave the green light to "radical" artists to hang their "extreme" artwork, it wasn't too accommodating to another exhibitor.

Santa Cruz artist Meghan Caughey, whose artwork was slated for exhibit in the League's da Vinci Gallery at the opposite end of the building from the radical show, had a scenario in contrast with the smooth sailing of the radicals.

Feb. 24, Caughey's exhibit, "Human Beings Attend the Last Supper," a collection of 9-foot pen-and-ink controversial drawings, went on exhibit just feet away from the life-size wax "Last Supper" figures. The da Vinci Gallery also is the setting for performances by West Abbey Productions, a Santa Cruz theater company.

Soon after Caughey's show opened, she received a call to close it.

"The day after the show was hung," she said, "I received a call from the Art League's president, Ed Ticher. He told me to take it down, that the theater group was upset with it. The curator had made a mistake. The show never should have gone up."

She said she had received final approval from the curator, Steve Wiltse, after attempting to go through proper channels earlier in the month,

cate and thought-provoking. Their varied tones of black ink range from subtle shadowing to heavy figure outlines. Among the spiritually based political pieces is one that stands out: a drawing of a child and dove. The dove is flying over a missile that turns into a cross in the background.

"I could understand the theater group's side. The drawings could be distracting," Caughey said. "I told them they could cover them up during performances. For two or three performances they put red velvet over them. I thought all was taken care of and resolved."

This wasn't the resolution she sought or the end of her plight. Another call came from Ticher. He told Caughey the theater company was opening a new play March 10, she said. They

wanted the drawings down, not covered.

The theater company's artistic director, Abbey Goss, said her request to close Caughey's show was not a reflection on the artwork.

"It's a very powerful exhibition," Goss said. "I have nothing against the work at all. Our agreement with the Art League is that artwork in the da Vinci Gallery should be compatible with our play. The room is very small. It's really not a theater; it's a gallery."

Although the room is viewed by Goss as a gallery and the artwork wasn't the issue, Caughey was still told to take down the exhibit before the play's opening and the reception for both the "Free Radicle Art Show" and the "Statewide

'I told him it was political and could be uncomfortable for people.'

Sculpture Show" last Friday evening.

"I had wanted to have them (the drawings) up for the reception," Caughey said. "I was willing to cooperate, but I wanted compensation: another time and date to show my work. I wanted to meet with the board at a special meeting. I was told 'no.'

"I like to compromise when possible, but Ticher then attacked the way they were hung. He said, 'Why aren't they under plexiglass?' I answered that human beings even in drawings have to breathe, plus I couldn't afford the plexiglass. I wanted the work to be close to the people viewing it."

According to Ticher, Caughey was told she could put the work back up after the weekend.

"I feel bad," Ticher said. "It was a mistake. We're refunding the money she paid for the space fee."

It appears that Caughey and Ticher are at a stalemate with both sides having lost the battle. Caughey has no commitment for a future show; Ticher has an empty gallery.