

Reduced to abstraction: 'A lot of sketching' helps artist Atwell create abstract works

By RICK BROWN, Hub Staff Writer
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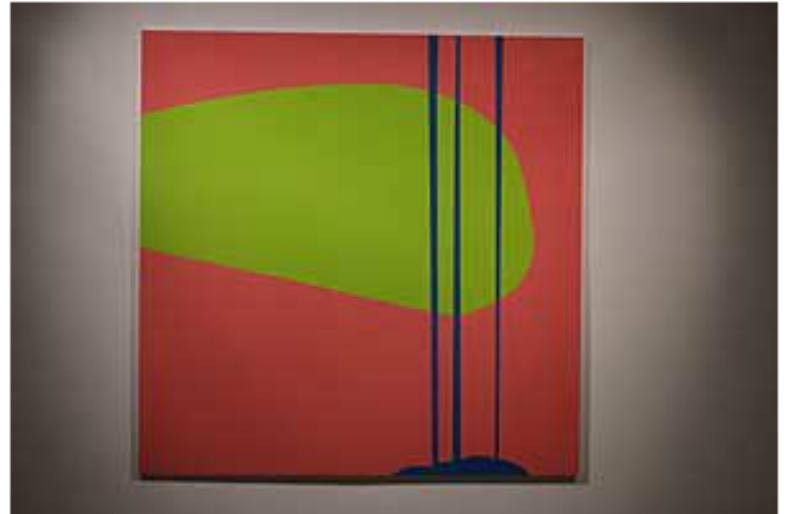
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KEARNEY — Robert Atwell draws vignettes of what he sees around him and reduces the images until he ends up with "severe abstractions."

That's how John Fronczak, art instructor at the University of Nebraska at Kearney and curator of the Walker Gallery on campus, describes the work of Atwell.

"While they are severely abstract," Fronczak said of the paintings, "they are still grounded in the observation of the world around us, and they are grounded in drawing. He goes through a lot of extensive sketching."

The pieces in "New Paintings and Works on Paper" by Atwell consist of enamel on metal foam board along with paper cutouts. His work is on display at the Walker Gallery through Sept. 26. The exhibition will close with a reception and a talk given by the artist at 5 p.m. Sept. 26 in Room 312 of UNK's Fine Arts Building.



Hub photo by Rick Brown

◆ Tue, June 26, 2007, 8:15am, ◆ 48 in by 48 in., by Robert Atwell, enamel on aluminum panel.

Each of Atwell's vignettes are dated to note the progression of the work, Fronczak noted. While the final product looks deceptively simple, Fronczak understands the amount of work that goes into each piece.

"Things such as furniture, common things in his home, things he notices outside — these are all subjects for his work," Fronczak said. "Quite often they are rather mundane, simple things. He sketches and re-sketches, each time simplifying the forms around us to very simple shapes."

Atwell often works with materials not normally used for making fine art.

"He uses sign-painter materials," Fronczak said.

The backing of his paintings is a dense foam board covered with a thin sheet of metal. The actual painting is done by cutting out stencils.

"When you look closely at the paintings you can see little ridge marks where the two areas of paint come together," Fronczak said. "Then he takes a roller and rolls the painting out with a house paint roller."

The tension of the lines between the areas of color are purposeful, the artist said.

In an e-mail interview from his home in Menomonie, Wis., Atwell wrote: "The tension is somewhat intentional in this series of works. Obviously the tensioned lines are not present in all of the paintings, but in those that they are, I am trying to create a sense of pull and suspension with the objects (shapes) that they are connected to."

Atwell said his goal is to create the image of suspended objects and to make them a bit more precarious.

Fronczak noted an interesting sense of composition in the work.

"I like the very simple, direct, basic composition," he said. "I like that they are all asymmetrical. He seems to be pushing the envelope a little bit as to what constitutes a balanced composition."

The value of the exhibition for Fronczak lies in what beginning design students can gain from the work.

"The main focus of our mission at the Walker Gallery is the students of UNK," he said. "This is a fabulous show for design students because they can see of all the processes he goes through to end up with these images."

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WHEN AND WHERE

"New Paintings and Works on Paper" by Robert Atwell through Sept. 26 at the Walker Gallery in the Fine Arts Building on the University of Nebraska at Kearney campus. 865-8353. Open 8 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Artist talk and reception for Atwell, 5 p.m. Sept. 26 in Room 312 of the Fine Arts Building.