

# BEST of kansas city

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

seized the opportunity to show their handiwork to such a dignified audience. For Student Curator Zac Johnson, selecting and hanging the works, collecting artists' statements and publicizing the show made for a real learning experience. "I learned that I won't do this again unless I get paid," he says. "It took a lot of time." But Johnson's effort — and the skill evident in the work on display — gave *Tensions* a fresh, well-put-together look that transformed the ramshackle KCAI student gallery into a destination more rewarding than some of the professional fiber shows held in conjunction with the conference.

**BEST ENCORE:  
ELVIS COSTELLO**

**BEST ILLUSTRATION SHOW**

N.C. Wyeth  
The Spencer Museum of Art

It's rare that work by an illustrator makes it from the pages of books and magazines to the walls of a fine-art museum. However, last winter, KU's Spencer Museum of Art exhibited N.C. Wyeth's original illustrations for the literary classics *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Kidnapped*, among others. Without pages of words to accompany them, the Golden Age illustrator's paintings retold the exotic adventures of pirates and Indians with shadowing instead of foreshadowing, color and line instead of description, and composition in place of plot.

**BEST INSTALLATION**

*Happiness* by Haegeen Kim  
The Bank Gallery

Last spring, former Kansas City artist Haegeen Kim covered the entire floor of a room in the Urban Culture Project's Bank Gallery (basically an empty storefront at 11th Street and Baltimore) with *Happiness*, a sculpture composed of hundreds of Day-Glo, Fruit Loop-colored paper rings. The minuscule rings varied in thickness and height — some raised a couple of inches off the ground; others were only fractions of an inch tall. Despite its size and complex order, the sprawling sculpture, like its namesake, looked timid and fragile, momentary and fleeting.

**BEST PAINTING SHOW**

*Midwest Narratives* by Bruce Erikson  
Stocksdale Gallery at William Jewell College

Baroque artists such as Caravaggio and Artemisia Gentileschi were the cinematographers of their day, using dramatic shadows and light within a composition to help tell a story. Four hundred years later, Bruce Erikson, a painter and former professor of art at Washington University in St. Louis, uses the same tricks of the trade, creating characters and playing out scenes on large oil canvases. His exhibition last winter at William Jewell College's Stocksdale Gallery lacked the sensational "conversion of saints" or "beheading of kings" themes common to the Baroque movement, projecting instead grandiose narratives on scenes of today's routine activities.



**BEST GROUP SHOW**

*Is/Was*  
Joseph Nease Gallery

Like the before-and-after pictures in a weight-loss advertisement, Joseph Nease Gallery's *Is/Was* documented a transformation in two steps. The show paired a current piece from each exhibitor with an artwork created five years ago. Some artists' work was barely recognizable — Susan White's "Inside the Box," a mesmerizing, video-taped field trip to a Tony's frozen pizza factory, looked like the work of a different artist when compared with "Pyrograph," her newer, burnt-paper piece. Even without the added interest of the then-and-now concept, *Is/Was* presented a solid body of work in a variety of media.

**BEST FOLK ARTIST**

Jennifer Field

Jennifer Field, who considers herself a self-taught folk artist, creates collages of landscapes and abstractions by riveting together scraps of metal from old cookie tins. Her otherworldly artwork is inspired by visions she receives while meditating, which she calls "snapshots of the inner Eden," so it's not surprising that Field doesn't worry about self-promotion. She doesn't even have a résumé or an artist's bio. "I'm about the Zen approach to art promotion," she says. "The less I do, the more I become recognized." It seems to be working. This year, Field received a Charlotte Street Award for her contribution to the Kansas City art community.

**BEST ARTIST**

Dylan Mortimer

Dylan Mortimer uses the basic graphic vocabulary found on signs and in instruction manuals to tackle complex

issues of faith and religion. The absurd notion that such a simplification is even possible makes his work funny, allowing believers as well as nonbelievers a way to appreciate work with taboo subject matter. The young Mortimer, a 2002 graduate of the Kansas City Art Institute painting department, kept busy during 2003, with his solo, site-specific installation *Museum of Faith Analysis* displayed this spring at the Kansas City Jewish Museum, followed by his *Prayer Booth* installation along the 2003 Avenue of the Arts. Mortimer's eagerness to address religion, a subject important to him, in such an original manner makes him noteworthy among Kansas City's rich resource of artists.

**BEST ART EXHIBIT**

Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art  
4420 Warwick Boulevard, 816-753-5784

In the 1830s, American landscape artist Thomas Cole created a series he called *The Course of Empire*, five paintings detailing the story of a civilization's rise and its eventual demise because of pride and corruption. Inspired by Cole, Jean Lowe paints landscapes following the development of land into housing tracts and strip malls. Although the mountainous, palm-tree-dotted backdrops are unmistakably Californian, the Wal-Mart and Target complexes she depicts are well-known everywhere. Lowe accompanies her grand canvases with papier-mâché, Empire-style furniture; the unique, handmade pieces contrast the homogenous items for sale in the strip malls depicted

in the paintings. With its massive suburban sprawl, Kansas City is an especially appropriate venue for *Jean Lowe: The Course of the Empire*, which runs through November 30 at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art.

**BEST FLIERS**

DJG Design  
www.djgdesign.com

Danny J. Gibson is DJG Design. He collects things — all kinds of things — but mostly trash. Not trash as in kitschy stuff at yard sales, and not trash as in the carton that used to hold the milk he finished off this morning with his cereal. Trash as in stuff in trash cans. He's a janitor with artistic ambitions, and he transforms refuse from his office-cleaning jobs into collage-based flier art promoting bands such as Elevator Division, Laredo, Namelessnumberheadman and the People. Preferring a handmade, idiosyncratic aesthetic to a slicker, digital look, Gibson creates promotional materials that look sincere — you can tell that a human being made them. And he isn't doing this on the side to make cash while he waits to get recognized as a painter or sculptor. This is what he wants to do; it's how he combines his love for music with his need to create in a way uniquely his own. None of this would matter if Gibson weren't talented, but he is — abundantly so. We like the fliers for the shows he promotes as much as we enjoy the shows themselves.

**BEST ALTER EGO**

Kelley Seda's "Mo"

Local comic-book artist Kelley Seda has a little secret. When she's not Kelley, author and illustrator of the fabulous *Rare Creature* series, she's Mo, author and illustrator of a strip called "Chortles." We mention this because people should know that when they've run out of precious yet cynical *Rare Creature* stuff to flip through, there's always "Chortles" on the *Tastes Like Chicken* Web site (tlchicken.com; click on "comics"). In the January issue, she did a strip on 2003 New Year's "Mo Solutions," which were simply resolutions for other people to fulfill, things that would make the world a better place. One of these solutions was to have all politicians become weathermen and all weathermen become politicians, the idea being that nobody would even notice a substitution of people who are always wrong for people who are always wrong. (One suit-wearing fellow pointed to the wall behind him and said, "Heads it's cloudy, tails we go to war.") Now, after a year of war and bad weather, we think she may have been on to something. Combining frightening accuracy and awesome drawings of people with signature lightbulb-shaped heads, Kelley and Mo get our double-stamp of approval.

**BEST WEEKEND TO GET GROSSED OUT**

September 5-7

The early fall weekend of September 5-7 was jam-packed with fun things to do, but somehow it all amounted to one gross-out

READERS' CHOICE  
PEREGRINE HONIG

READERS' CHOICE  
PLAZA ART FAIR