Arts important for spiritual health

Local artist fears lack of funds will hurt the arts

By Dixie Simon
Staff Writer

SCOTT - At a time when her own art-star is sparkling, Scott multi-media artist Lynda Frese steps from behind camera, canvas and computer to console a universal art world on its impending loss of status.

"It's a dangerous time for artists right now, where they're not being funded and honored," said Frese, 39, a USL associate professor. "As an art educator, I feel strongly that art helps us understand ourselves - like reflections in a mirror. It's important for our spiritual health.

"As an artist, I won't quit producing art because of it," she continued, "but it saddens me because it will be harder for people to have art in their lives.

Coincidentally, Frese recently received an award administered by one of the arts-funded groups she referred to, jeopardized by the U.S. government's recent cut-backs.

Her project, "Works of Lynda Frese," a photo-collage exhibit combining photography, drawings, paintings and computer imaging, won her a 1995 Regional Designation Award from the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games Cultural Olympiad.

Frese's Olympic award was presented under the auspices of the Southern Arts Foundation, a non-profit group composed of nine southern states charged with the job of providing leadership and effecting positive change for the arts throughout the South.

With three shows currently on exhibition in Atlanta, New Orleans and Jackson, Miss., Frese is this summer's hot artist.

Pinning down what's jet-propelling her rise in the art world is a lot like describing her artistic style - a little difficult.

Winning awards helps, but a southern consciousness about its place in history and cultural legitimacy pushes to the forefront Frese's current work, exploring memory against a southern vernacular landscape.

"My work shows how history and myth intertwine to inform each other," the artist explained. "That's what memory is, a conversation with the past."

Using cut-and-paste techniques, earlier assemblages by Frese combined her own photographic prints with snapshots produced by others. In 1991 her artwork took a high-tech leap when she booted up a computer for the first time in USL's computer lab.

"Five years later I'm known as a computer artist and nationally shown," Frese said. "I still can't get over it."

By computer scanning actual objects - slave bracelets and collars, Civil War era coins, strands of human hair - and blending their images on the computer with scanned antique photographs borrowed from the Natchitoches Archives, Frese creates "seamless" photo montages that flow effortlessly over the artwork's surface as her re-created worlds cross time zones.

"Manipulating photographic images on a computer allows me to re-imagine a landscape or scene," Frese said. "It's very mental. You can cut and paste without the physical process."

"The big challenge in computer-generated art," she added, "is getting it out of the computer and into the world as a beautiful object."

Showing her work to so many people in different places puts her in a completion phase right now, Frese says, referring to her evolution as an artist.

"But that's why my photographic and design students at the university don't understand," she said. "Evolution of an artist's style is a natural and holistic process - it unfolds and is not planned or predictable. Most important, it takes place over time."

After this round of glitzy gallery openings and art receptions, she says it's back to the often publicly unrewarding life of the solitary studio artist.

"But as an artist, I'm lucky," she added. "I can make art up till I die. It's not something you retire from. And I've got a lot of plans."

Scott artist Linda Frese uses photographic and computer images to compose works of art. She first started using computers in her works while taking a computer lab at USL.

Photos by Kim Andrus

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