ACADIANA ARTIST LIVES FOR HIS CRAFT

By Becky Tillson
Staff Writer

Since 1978, David Fox has devoted much of his vast talent to developing the arts in Acadiana.

He works for pleasure and for profit, but for Fox, the two seem much the same.

"Other than my family, my work is the source of meaning in my life," he said.

Fox is a visual artist with a touch for everything from corporate logos to vivid hands-on creative workshops for children.

In fact, Fox has more than 16 years' experience in the classroom, a compliment to his lifelong career as a designer.

With a Master of Fine Arts degree in sculpture and painting form the University of Colorado, Fox blurs the lines perceived to exist between commercial art and "real" art. Yet, as a fine arts devotee, he is just as comfortable with commercial design or a room full of students.

"The one thing all artists seem to have in common is a love of image making," Fox said. "In my designing of special effects, communication materials and site-specific art works, the word coined by the Disney people — 'Imaginester' — most describes my work."

A National Endowment for the Arts grant brought Fox to Lafayette and the Acadiana Arts Council in 1978.

His project was to research the level of arts awareness in this area and then suggest ways to increase local arts involvement.

The result: a long-range commitment to bringing the arts to children which can now be traced to a variety of art council projects, including the Bright New Worlds program which brings artists into the classroom.

"I feel very committed to young people," he said.

"And I'm very concerned about our public schools.

"Teachers must deal with a variety of social problems and I find the humanizing effect of the arts is helpful here," he added. "Arts activities personalize learning and bolster self-esteem."

It is a strikingly unusual combination: An artist whose dedication to painting and sculpture is equal to his commitment to creating a good logo or teaching children about art masters.

He spoke with unveiled enthusiasm about a classroom project he consulted last year.

Called "Unmask the Masters," the project inspired a group of students to active, in-depth learning about an artist of their choice.

When art club students chose Picasso, Fox and teacher Lana Budeal helped produce a live performance celebrating Picasso at a statewide youth art club conference.

The students designed a stage production in which a young man sat alone, center stage, wearing a mask covered by one of Picasso's self portraits.

Then, a group of students came on stage, hidden by the abstract shapes they carried.

"Like puzzle pieces the shapes gently came together to form one of Picasso's famous Cubist paintings, 'The Three Musicians,' " Fox said. "Then three students wearing the last three pieces — the faces of the three musicians — came on stage to finish the picture," Fox continued.

More recently, Fox finished a project at J. Wallace James Elementary call the Welcome Window.

Fox helped the student create a large mixed-media portrait of the school and four first-grade classes, 87 brightly colored clay self portrait figurines, dance before a 4-by-8-foot painting of the school prepared by a second-grade class.

But the latest in Fox's energetic array of designs is a car parked in his studio beneath a life-like Pterodactyl suspended from the ceiling near a couple of large Muppet-like paper mache "banana slugs" — both remnants of various projects.

Fox painted the car for the Acadiana Art Council's Rally Round the Arts car show held Saturday at Blackham Coliseum.

The only routine common to the artist's unpredictable career is the daily commute to Lafayette from his secluded home in rural Vermilion Parish.

Fox Design Studios is located in an unlikely metal building in a sort of warehouse district near Acadian Village.

His studio is without one of the mainstays of many commercial design studios. He has no computer.

Fox continues to design and draw all of his work by hand — no quick computer graphics or clip art.

"I've never seen a computer come up with a concept," he laughed. "That is where the designer can never be replaced."

Nor the teacher.