

CMU's new studio looks toward the future of art

By Donald Miller
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How will the arts grow? This question and Carnegie Mellon University's role in that future have spurred CMU's College of Fine Arts to begin its Studio for Creative Inquiry, a new program for artistic investigation.

"We're in business," said Bryan Rogers, art head and director of SFCI. "This studio is envisioned as a development site for activities on the edge — a cultural 'free zone' where the unnameable can be nurtured."

"We are asking," said Lowry Burgess, College of Fine Arts dean, sculptor and art professor, "is there a path around the historical issues that have distorted and destroyed the last 200 years? A better way that would not lay waste to the planet?"

"We want to encourage collaborative projects throughout the university and globally. This studio will be a place where faculty members and other selected fellows may explore creative work that interacts with the environment and bonds contrasting intellectual approaches."

"We see the studio," Rogers said, "as a transmitter of experimental ideas. A kind of incubator for linking us to the future."

The studio is in the college's old faculty club, Room 111. Its elegant fireplace and wood paneling remain. But a two-story free-standing collection of small offices has been constructed within it, marking a border between donnish past and evolving future.

One of its ongoing programs is a piano tutor project — computer-based piano training. "The tutor monitors what you're doing and can show you what you did wrong," Burgess explained. This is an enormous help to piano teachers because

it prevents students from practicing their mistakes."

First on the studio's agenda is sponsoring a fellowship program. From this the majority of studio activities will emerge. Fellows will be chosen competitively and invited. Fellows will operate in the spirit of the fine arts but will branch out as broadly as possible, Burgess said.

The studio's major projects are a student exchange with the School of Art, Aix-en-Provence, France, bringing students and scientists to explore biological and artificial intelligence. Meetings have already been exchanged.

"Aix is part of several international projects we're incubating," Burgess said. "We have talks going for projects in Montreal, Canada, and Karlsruhe, Germany. We believe in global conversation on a very efficient scale."

Rogers added, "We are also interested in art and architecture, high-tech and old tech. We are discussing an archaeological site in Sparta, Greece, for setting up a center dealing with human and cultural ecology."

"In late October we expect to participate in a 'Gallery of Art Centers' like ours. There are 20 around the world and we will try to interlink them. This gallery will be in the School for Advanced Visual Studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology."

Burgess is a former fellow at the Cambridge, Mass., school. It is directed by artist Otto Piene, who exhibited sky sculptures above Downtown and Point State Park in 1970.

CMU's project with MIT is to organize slow-scan and other television networks, decoding TV images so they could be transmitted by radio and telephone. This would allow educational programs to be sent to



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Peter Capell at keyboard of piano tutor in Studio for Creative Inquiry.

remote areas of the globe. The slowed-down image would change every eight seconds, creating a curious animation effect. "But it's affordable TV vs. costly satellite transmission," Burgess said.

Bruce Breland, CMU art professor with years of experience in spatial communication, will be a part of this program which Burgess and Rogers hope to have ready in two years.

The past tugs too. "We're ready to look at how to develop a huge body of information on the arts of ancient Egypt as an interactive learning project," Burgess said. "Students will have access to a breadth and depth of information that will be tremendous."

This will be the first in a series of history/electronic media projects. Through it students will do research and talk with experts via computer. Lynn Holden is directing this program. An art historian specializing in ancient Egypt, Holden, of Newport, R.I., painted the replica tomb interior for The Carnegie's Walton Hall of Ancient Egypt.

The first external fellows arrive on campus next month. They are Artur Matuck, professor of telecommunications and electronic media, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, and Seth Riskin, light artist and national champion gymnast. Besides working with students, Riskin will prepare new performances and improve the college's lighting apparatus.