OLAF AND OLGA DIDN’T HAVE TO WORK
SO HARD TO BE ACCEPTED.
ALL THEY NEEDED WAS A MEMBERSHIP.
OPENING DOORS
Season’s first show offers glimpse of TASI tenants’ art

Cyndi Grimes, Sue Wright, Rhonda Rodman, Rhonda McNally, Marianna Measells, Bruce Demenski, Karen Demenski, Sandra Laurrette, Suzanne Guerrett, Stephen Szabo, Elizabeth Pearson and Andy Coughlan.

McNally is one of the “girls in the back” who regularly gather on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the clay area to work, share ideas and generally enjoy each other’s company.

“Anyone interested in learning how to work with clay is welcome to come talk with us on most Tuesdays or Thursdays evenings,” McNally said. “We will be glad to share how we got started at The Studio and why we are enjoying the workspace, learning opportunities, and camaraderie.”

They offer lessons in the clay area (Cyndi Grimes is holding classes in October, see page 12 for information) or they get involved in The Studio years ago when she took a class there. McNally said it is not only the work that draws them to The Studio. “We are members of The Art Studio to meet not only our individual hobby needs, but also to help support the many other events and activities the Art Studio offers,” she said. “Come join in on the fun.”

Marianna Measells has a space at TASI where she expresses herself in a variety of media. She said she looked forward to the new season of art shows. “The Tenants Show, to me, is like a reunion — a time to see and visit with friends we don’t always see during the summer,” she said. “It allows us an opportunity to share in the vision of the new creativeness that continues to develop year after year.”

Full tenant spaces are available for $85 a month. Partial tenant status is only $40 a month. This affords artists access to all the facilities The Studio has to offer, including the dark room.

“Even though I have been continuously working, the Tenants Show is symbolic of a new beginning,” tenant Andy Coughlan said. “I try to have something new and different for the show — it’s our chance to show off what we do.”

Coughlan said he is taking advantage of the freedom of the Tenants Show to try something that he would not have the freedom to try at a larger show with more people.

“What I have will be spectacular — and it will be affordable,” he said, with an eye to commerce.

Much of the work the tenants will show is affordable, so visitors should not be shy about making a purchase.

Cyndi Grimes said that being a tenant means many things. “It’s about sharing ideas, learning new techniques, refreshing old techniques by teaching, battling extreme temperatures and seeing friends on a regular basis,” she said.

“More information on how to become a tenant, call 409-836-5393. Spaces are available.”

Rhonda Morely, left, works on a piece of a “rain chain” in the clay area of The Art Studio. McNally is one of the artists who gather every Tuesday and Thursday to make art. This clay tower, above, is part of a project this group is working on for the Tenants Show.

Photos by Andy Coughlan

DOWNTOWN VENUE OFFERS ART, MUSIC — AND A CUP OF JOE

I told an eclectic set there with an eclectic crowd and it was definitely an eclectic gathering of people and music.”

“Everyone encourages people, even those who aren’t into music, to come by and check it out,” Roddy said. “Every time you go there is different art on the walls from area artists. It’s a great way to support our local scene.”

According to Crawford, the name and motto for the downtown coffee lounge came from an unlikely source. “The name came from a neighbourhood dog that was barking and keeping me up at night,” Crawford said. “It’s one of the very few free trade coffee shops in the area, and we have our local economy, but the coffee farmers, the people who can come network, to get to know each other and have a good time.”

Of course, it would not be a coffee lounge without a menu. The Barking Dog offers a healthy menu with a variety of medium-coffee drinks.

“We serve different teas, coffees, lattes and cappuccinos,” Crawford said. “For lunch we have lighter, non-greasy foods like sandwiches and salads. We have different pastries for desert and breakfast. But the majority of our menu consists of different coffee related drinks.”

Upcoming events at The Barking Dog Lounge include an art exhibit by Michelle Cate on Sept. 5 and a concert Sept. 27 featuring We Were Wolves and Cousin Phelpy.

For more information visit www.mypace.com/thebarkingdoglounge.

Putting on the dog

“COME, SIT DOWN, there’s a new dog in town.”

The Barking Dog Coffee Lounge on Pearl Street downtown Beaumont offers an eclectic atmosphere for musicians, local artists and coffee drinkers alike.

Established February by Joyce Crawford of Fannett, The Barking Dog offers a variety of food, fun and atmosphere.

“We are trying to go for a more anti-corporate, indie type atmospheres,” Crawford said. “We wanted to give it kind of an urban look, with the walls stripped down to the bare brick and concrete. The furniture has a 1950s and 1960s theme — it’s very eclectic and minimalist.”

According to Crawford, part of lounge’s mission is to aid artists and musicians in their endeavors.

“We want to act as a resource for local artists and musicians to get their works seen or heard on a platform they may not normally be able to.”

“Fridays and Saturdays we typically have a concert featuring a local band and an out of town one. We have monthly art exhibits, fashion shows, and things like that. So while people are coming in for their coffee experience they will also be exposed to works of art or music while they are here.”

Local musician Blake Reddy of Beaumont describes The Dog as a low key environment that is supportive of our local arts and economy.

“It’s one of the very few free trade coffee shops in the area,” Reddy said. “It not only supports our local economy but the coffee farmers as well. That’s very important to me, and one of the reasons I like to play there.”

“There are always quite a few people at the shows. The people that hang out there are usually open minded and into all kinds of music.

Photos by Andy Coughlan

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September 2008
George Wentz sits in his wheelchair, the result of his latest battle with the diabetes he has lived with for 17 years. The August sunlight etching the lines on his face and reflecting off the glasses that dominate his face. It is tempting to see him as frail, as somehow diminished by life. But when the conversation turns to art, Wentz’s inner strength brightens his sparse surroundings.

Hometown-born Wentz is a testament to the action of the New York artists he so admires and the vibrant sun-drenched color of the post impressionists. His physical frailties are nothing more than surface impediments. Inside, his creative forces drive him forward. He thinks deeply about the way that art reveals a person’s place in the world. It is not about a particular skill set, but about finding a way for one to express himself.

“I think that’s the main thing the 20th Century was about—who will be bold enough to find their own journey?” he said. “And then, who will be bold enough to continue on with it? Because if you continue on with it, you are going to have to pay a lot of prices.”

Wentz said he has paid the price for living with his art. “I have been beat up, persecuted, misunderstood, called everything, loved, hated — I don’t care. I’ve just loved what I’ve done.”

“I’ve had a lot of rough times in my life. But the rough times have made me who I am and I’ve learned to dig deep inside of me and dig out the strength that was there and go on. And I will go on through this illness that I have. And I will go on to something new.”

He still paints almost every day, as he has for more than 40 years. Wentz said his latest illness has affected his hands so that holding the brushes is difficult. His physical frailties affect the way he paints but in some ways it enhances the gestural technique he has been practicing for years.

“I have learned not to hold the brush so tight,” he said, adding that it can give the flower paintings the organic quality he seeks.

“I can paint the floppiest poppies,” he said. “But if I don’t use the looseness in my hands, the flowers get stiff. What people like in my art is that loose spontaneity.”

Wentz laughed and said his illness is a blessing in disguise. He was born in 1945 on Washington Boulevard in Beaumont.

“I was born in an old house that was a city hospital after World War II,” he said. “I really must say I have often thought of why I am an artist and why people have enjoyed my work so, and I don’t know. I don’t know if anyone knows who they are and why they do what they do.”

Wentz said he had exceptional parents. “I had a very hard-working father who had a lot of patience, and a happy mother who had a lot of patience,” he said. “My father didn’t go far in school, but my mother graduated from college as a valudiceterian. She had a great sense of joy and a sense of how to heal her family when they were hurt. She studied psychology and literature and seemed to gain a lot of insight into human nature that way.”

Wentz said he began drawing and painting when he was about five years old, and it kept on until he was in high school where he began to study under Herman Hugg at South Park High School.

“Herman had a wonderful relaxed way of getting his students to cooperate and be themselves,” he said. “There were some students who went into designing cars, designing anything at all that was mechanical. Then I went into still life, landscapes and figurines.”

After high school, Wentz attended Lamar Tech, which later became Lamar University, majoring in pre-med.

“I made A’s places all the way through, but after about two years I thought ‘Do I really want to do this?’” he said. “Did I really want to be a doctor, into blood and bodies and sickness?”

Wentz took a class in design and composition as an elective and “fell in love with it.”

“My teacher said, ‘Why are you training to be a doctor? You need to be a painter,’” he said. “Myrtle Kerter worked with Wentz for two semesters. She was an excellent art teacher,” he said. “She had a great sense of design, a great sense of humor and a lot of joy.”

A sense of joy is a recurring theme in any conversation with Wentz. It is the one constant that has infused his work through the decades.

“My teacher said, ‘Why are you training to be a doctor?’” he said. “Well, I can do these things. I know a lot of other guys and girls who do these things and they seem to have fun with it, so I thought I would try my best,” he said.

Wentz, then a first-senior freshman, entered the poetry contest and the illustration contest in Pulse (Lamar’s literary magazine) and won first prize in both.

“I was so surprised,” he said. “People just like the stuff I do. And that’s all I’ve done ever since.”

Wentz said that it got to a point that when he got home from school he didn’t want to do his homework. He went straight to his easel and painted all weekend, day and night. He estimates that, in his lifetime, he has produced around 3,000 pieces.

“That’s everything from a greeting card to any kind of design on a business card, an oil painting or acrylic painting on canvas, watercolor — you name it, I’ve done it,” he said.

Wentz is currently working on what he calls “gratuitous paintings,” the style of painting produced by the American abstract expressionists from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s.

“They created a style of art that will never be forgotten,” he said.

Wentz acknowledges that people who have no education in art tend to dismiss the style as childish.

“In a way, that’s the whole purpose of art,” he said. “Not to make it look like a child necessarily, but to do it like a child. These people claimed that the finished pieces were not the works of art. The actual works of art was the mentality involved and the gestural movement of their arms and hands and of the brush.”

“It’s not completely confined, it’s kind of semi-confined.”

Wentz said that while he loves abstract expressionism, it is not the only form he likes to use.

“I have to make a living, I have to eat, I have to pay taxes,” he said. “So I do another thing that I have found people like, and that is my flower paintings.

“When I was about 12 years old, my mother bought my brother and I a set of American Encyclopedias,” he said. “Under the section of painting, there was a section on Matisses. I studied those and became so wrapped up in them that I copied them over and over. Then I began to enter poetry contests.”

That’s life, by George

Artist reflects on four decades as a practicing painter

Story and photos by Andy Coughlan

George Wentz shows off his playful side, far left, his serious side and his art at his home in Beaumont.

See WENTZ on page 11
Christina Thorne to exhibit at BAL

One word sums up 2007 Beaumont Art League Membership Show winner Christina Thorne — exuberant.

With her large, bold acrylics, Thorne's work and personality exude passion, spontaneity and enthusiasm, Dan Dorman, BAL director, said.

Thorne's prize included a solo show on display Sept. 6-27.

"Her winning entry, an acrylic collage titled 'All Gussied Up,' reflects that boldness," he said. "I can't wait to exhibit at the league."

"You have to look closely to see everything that there is to see in my works" she said.

Thorne has exhibited all around Southeast Texas and has had solo exhibitions as far away as the Big Bend area.

"I can't wait to exhibit at the league," said. "I have a sense of space, joyfulness and drama. Usually large, her works fill galleries."

Thorne has been painting since the 1970s and claims that her paintings are a reflection of herself — quirky, lively and full of surprises.

In a recent painting of the "elephant ears" plant, she stenciled an elephant subduing in the work.

"I was so inspired by the shape of the ears" plant, she said.

"You have to look closely to see everything that there is to see in my works" she said.

Thorne has exhibited all around Southeast Texas and has had solo exhibitions as far away as the Big Bend area.

BAL is located at 2675 Gulf Street. For more information, contact Dorman at 409.833.4179, or visit the league's website at www.mypace.com/beaumontartleague.
Women’s of the BEAUMONT ART LEAGUE’S CAMER CLUB PHOTO SHOW results were announced at a reception July 12 at the Beaumont Art League. First place was awarded to Richard Tallent for “Song for Paris.” Second place was awarded to Matt Mason for “The Thinker,” and third place was awarded to Hank Landry for “Meat Eaters.”

Juror Danny Dubuisson wrote, “Overall, the show is very diverse and technically sound. This was a hard show to judge because of the quality of work. It is very refreshing to see so many people expressing themselves through photography with such a variety of subject matter.”

The BLAFFER GALLERY, the Art Museum of the University of Houston, will present CELEBRATIONS, GUNSTICKS, LEATHERS AND POISONOUS FLOWERS: A PHOTOGRAPHIC LEGACY FROM THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION, beginning Sept. 12. Showcasing a selection of Warhol’s personal photographs recently donated to the University of Houston by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the exhibition will be on view from Sept. 13 through Oct. 18. A free opening reception is scheduled for Sept. 12 at 6 p.m.

“The last ten years of his life, whether he was in his studio or a party, Warhol always had a small, point-and-shoot Mini or Polaroid camera in hand,” Jeffrey Brown, Blaffer Gallery assistant director of external affairs said in a press release. “When he died on Feb. 22, 1987, he left behind over 66,000 photographs. In 2008, the Andy Warhol Foundation, the inheritor of the Warhol estate, gifted groups of over 66,000 photographs to institutions across the country, including approximately 110 Polaroid and black-and-white prints to the Universities of Houston.

Michael Guidry, curator of the University of Houston Art Collection, said, “The photos are most valuable because they are a rare scence glimpse into Warhol’s working process, especially for his famous portraits. Warhol would take many, many Polaroids of his clients posing, putting high contrast makeup on them. Some are very flat and some are not so flattering. Many of the Polaroids were static for paintings and the black-and-white prints are a mix of travel and party pictures of his friends and social network.”

The Blaffer Gallery is located in the Fine Arts Building on the University of Houston’s central campus.

For more information, contact Brown at 713-743-9201.

The Post Art Historical Society presents PLANET ADAPTATION UP CLOSE: A BIOLOGICAL AND ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE GULF COAST through Oct. 19. The group is about an exciting and a chance for the community to support the museum and ensure that Drillers, to continue offering the wonderful cultural enhancements its programs and exhibitions bring to Southeast Texas community.

The evening begins at 6:30 p.m. with cocktails and a silent auction. The auction will feature several fine art pieces including a custom pool cue by Richard Black and photographs by Carter.

If you come across any interesting exhibitions, museums or other places on your travels, share them with us. Call 409-838-5393, or visit www.museumofthegulfcoast.org.

Winners of the 4TH ANNUAL BEAUMONT ARTLEAGUE CAMER CLUB PHOTO SHOW results were announced at a reception Aug. 9. First place in the figure show was awarded to Richard Tallent for “Parent and Child.” Second place was awarded to Andy Coughlan for “Red Wrap (Alley Ingress),” and third place was awarded to Matt Mason for “Figure Study 429.”

First place in the 3D show was awarded to Annie Orchard for “Tea Da.” Second place was awarded to Forest Goodhue for “Industrial Tower,” and third place was awarded to Ljke Albright for “Dog Prototype 1.”

Tickets begin at $250 per person $2,000 for a table of eight. Patron and Outstanding Member tickets are also available. Scanting is limited. Call 409-832-3432. Dress is black tie. Proceeds from the event will support AMSET’s exhibition and education programs.

The purpose of The Art Studio, Inc. is to(1) provide educational opportunities between the public and the community of artists and (2) to offer a unique experience for artists to provide studio space and exhibition space to working artists and craftsmen, and to provide a venue for group work sessions for those artists and craftspeople to work together on their projects and enthusiasm to each other.

The mission of AMSET is to (1) promote public exhibitions; (2) provide educational opportunities; (3) to present cultural programs to the public; (4) to provide peer feedback through association with other events and arts programs.

The Port Arthur Historical Society presents PLANET ADAPTATION UP CLOSE: A BIOLOGICAL AND ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE GULF COAST through Oct. 19. The group is about an exciting and a chance for the community to support the museum and ensure that Drillers, to continue offering the wonderful cultural enhancements its programs and exhibitions bring to Southeast Texas community.

The evening begins at 6:30 p.m. with cocktails and a silent auction. The auction will feature several fine art pieces including a custom pool cue by Richard Black and photographs by Carter.

The program will feature a discussion on the plight of wildlife and how to do variations on those designs. It became that I got really obsessed with the fish, drawing style, and the fact that he loved to draw flowers, women, fruit — anything that had a lot of voluptuous curves. Wentz calls this style, “Intimism.” It shows the artist’s intimate view of the artist’s studio, of his or her personal home,” he said. “I’m an intimate view of how people live in their personal space. We don’t have to come some- where like the Big Stink to see great beauty. It’s right in every- body’s home.”

Wentz said he has got to a point where he doesn’t know what is coming out of his brain from now on, but what is coming out is much more simplified. It’s a simple, abstract style as if all Matisse is broken down into one, two or three curves and one, two or three colors,” he said. Wentz sorts through the pieces that lie in piles all over his house. As each piece is turned he gives a description of the process. At times he gets quiet pondering the image and remem- bering the pleasure of the process. Then he speaks into life and excitedly points out the beauty of a line or the splash of color that suggests the railing on a New Orleans building.

After he left Lama, Wentz lived in Houston for five years. He remembers one of his projects from the late 60s and, while Wentz said he did not consider himself a happy “I might as well have been happy.” He said he was right in the thick of the Height-Ashbury scene. Wentz said that he didn’t get into drugs, and many of his hippy friends didn’t either.

“They were just trying to say, America, slow down,” he said. “Scream and shout dollars every year just not worth it. You’re going to have a heart attack, you know what I mean?”

“We would get together and talk about how to cook things cheaply — mainly we would have fun” he said. “We were good kids back then.”

At the end of the day Wentz said it was too expensive for him to stay. He supported himself through his art and a series of jobs.

“I did everything,” he said. “I sold landscaping, cleared land. I moved lawn. But I was very strong. That was when I was born 21 and 35 years old.”

“That was the best part of my life.”

Wentz reflected wistfully as he shifted slightly in his wheel- chair. His quiet doesn’t last long.

Warhol would take many, many Polaroids of his clients posing, putting high contrast makeup on them. Some are very flat and some are not so flattering. Many of the Polaroids were static for paintings and the black-and-white prints are a mix of travel and party pictures of his friends and social network.

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When you support The Art Studio with your membership, you receive ISSUE, Southeast Texas' and Southwest Louisiana's alternative press as well as class schedules, invitations to opening receptions and various Studio functions.

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These people are the life blood of our organization. WE COULDN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU!

To volunteer, drop by The Art Studio, Inc., or call 409-838-5393.

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Uriah Keneson  
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Torchy  
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Lige  
Joanna Clark  
Chris Dombrowsky

**GRIMES TO HOLD CLAY CLASSES AT TASI**

Artist Cyndi Grimes will offer clay classes for two weeks in October, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Dates to be determined.

If you are interested in participating, contact Grimes at txcynpottery@sbcglobal.net

**ISSUE DISTRIBUTION POINTS**

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**This project is funded in part by the Texas Commission on the Arts, Dishman Trust, Entergy, HEB, and the Vic Rogers Foundation through the Southeast Texas Arts Council.**

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