

Art review: Seattle Times, Sunday, May 7, 1995
Washington: 100 Years, 100 Paintings", Bellevue Art Museum
By Matthew Kangas

"Washington: 100 Years, 100 Paintings," Bellevue Art Museum, 301 Bellevue Square, through June 25.
Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, 10 a.m.- 6 p.m.; Tuesday and Friday, 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.; Sunday 11
a.m.- 5 p.m. \$3 adults, \$2 students and seniors; free to children 12 and under, 454-3322.

There's a huge rogue elephant of a show at the Bellevue Art Museum this month and next. "Washington:
100 Years, 100 Paintings" is a valiant effort to trace the rise of painting in Washington state.

Unfortunately, the survey is hung salon-style - that is, stacked in uneven rows throughout. So even the most
ardent admirer of Northwest art may find it difficult to view comfortably. This may have been the way art was
displayed in 1895, but haven't we come a long way since then?

To steer the viewer in the right direction, associate curator Susan Sagawa has divided the museum into time
periods: 1900-1939, 1940-1959, 1960-1979, and 1980 to the present. This helps somewhat but, with the
crowded walls overpowering the viewer, no effort at art-historical ranking is possible. It's truly democratic,
with each artist's works hung just as awkwardly as everyone else's.

Tours scheduled

An extensive series of tours, lectures, and panel discussions is scheduled so that any objections may be
aired openly along with healthy arguments about the state of painting in Washington past and present.

Let there be no confusion: The most important art in the state has always been made in Seattle. This began
as early as 1919 when Australian-born Impressionist painter Ambrose Patterson arrived to begin teaching at
the University of Washington.

Before that, there were artists like pioneer painter Harriet Foster Beecher, but modern art came to dominate
at the UW by 1935 and the generations of students that followed looked outward to Asia and Europe for their
inspirations.

Mark Tobey and his followers Kenneth Callahan (who was once The Seattle Times art critic), Morris Graves,
Guy Anderson and Wesley Wehr fused ecology and spirituality in the 1950s and they are well represented.
Strangely, the most international of the group, Windsor Utley, is omitted.

Mid-century rivals

Their mid-century rivals on campus - UW dean Walter F. Isaacs, Patterson and his wife Viola, Fred Ander-
son and Wendell Brazeau - look especially strong even in this setting.

Treasures by familiar favorites Michael Spafford, Randy Hayes, Fay Jones, and William Cumming are there
but buried.

Abstract artists suffer unduly because their work is often about space and light and there simply isn't enough
of either surrounding their pictures. Canvases by William Ivey, Mary Henry, Margaret Tomkins, Lois Graham,
William Turner and Francis Calentano are reduced to cramped decorative appurtenances.

Leo Kenney and Malcolm Roberts, the area's first surrealists, are missing, too, but their successor Jacques
Moitoret is well taken care of. It's good to see outsiders like Joe Reno and Jay Steen involved, as well as
younger stars like Ken Kelly and Collin Shutz, but their strengths are undermined by the headache-inducing
arrangement.

Sagawa has given viewers lots to mull over if they can make it all the way through the funhouse. But the bad
lighting, salon stacking and helter-skelter floor plan don't serve the art well. Both the public - and the
century's span of local painters - deserve better.