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We've Arrived



Omaha's art scene burst at the seams in 2007

by Sarah Baker

If 2006 was the year Omaha's art scene stuck to its course, 2007 was the year it exploded with possibility.

This year offered more of everything: artists, galleries, viewers, collaborations, opportunity. Looking back at Reader art coverage in '07, there is too much to mention. Here goes.

Select Cuts, a succinct show at west Omaha's Jewish Community Center early in the year included three young artists that continue to challenge Midwestern aesthetic: **Joey Lynch, Jake Gillespie and Peggy Gomez**. Lynch moved to Omaha in 2007, snuggled himself in the basement of the Bemis Center and got creative. It's been a big year for him; he did visuals on Bright Eyes' world tour, continued to collaborate with Saddle Creek, became a fixture at the Bemis and just opened his first solo show in the city at Pulp in Benson.

Gillespie continued to thrive, curating a show at Lincoln's Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery that included many new paintings from his own hand, and garnering his first Kansas City show. Gomez stayed the course with her Lincoln art store, **Gomez Art Supply**, in its new, more visible downtown location. She showed in the Bemis Underground and the Sheldon. What is in the future for the original "Tugboat three" remains unanswered as Lincoln's gallery wunderkind, the Tugboat, remains closed after many proposed opening dates came and went. Let's hope it returns in '08.

The area's power players didn't disappoint. Sheldon used its construction woes as a chance to give artists much-needed space in the three-part series "Sheldon Connections." These were among the best of the year. It's clear the artists chosen to curate and exhibit in Sheldon (Jamie Burmeister, Sue Knight, Ann Gradwohl, Tim Guthrie, Gomez, Gillespie, Michael Burton, Tredway, Eddie Dominguez, Caitlin Applegate and Leslie Iwai, among others) saw it as an opportunity and honor. The work was top notch, innovative and challenging. Three other Sheldon shows were fantastic: Comic Art from the Permanent Collection, Chris Ware and The Comic Vision of Charley Friedman.

Omaha began to take art seriously with its most significant public art project: 22 O! sculptures whose creators took a stab at being more artistic than kitsch and did a fine job. The project offers an interesting look at what artists do with public art when left to their own devices. They make excellent, challenging work.