

Community NEWS

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Art explores mystery



Photo by David Lee Hartlage

Conceptual artist and photographer Adam Brown's new exhibition space, Isis Conceptual Laboratory, opened in West Branch this month. Brown will connect laboratory visitors with the artists whose work is in the exhibit at a private showing Thursday, Feb. 20.

Isis' 'C U SEE US' teleconference connects artists and visitors

■ *Isis Conceptual Laboratory examines the myth surrounding Hoover Library statue.*

By **Linda Schreiber**
COMMUNITY NEWS Editor

Technology will connect Isis Conceptual Laboratory, Inc. visitors with the New York artists whose work is included in the West Branch installation.

Isis Conceptual Laboratory curator Adam Brown says the live "C U See Me" teleconference will be held Thursday, Feb. 20, from 5 to 9 p.m. to raise awareness of the new facility and to raise funds for future exhibits at the laboratory.

A highlight of the evening will be the opportunity to meet and mingle with the artists electronically via a C U See Me cyberspace visit. The event will also feature a wine tasting and refreshments from the New Pioneer Co-op.

The public is invited to "chat" with the artists from 5 to 6 p.m. and enjoy a private showing of five unique and interesting wines. Tickets for C U See Me and the wine tasting are available for \$38 from the New Pioneer Coop in Iowa City or at Isis Conceptual Laboratory.

The hookup will allow the 24 New York artists included in the exhibit to visit West Branch. According to Brown only one of the artists has ever visited the town where former President Herbert Hoover was born.

Guests will be able to see, hear and speak to the artists in New York and the artists will also be able to see and hear the reactions of visitors viewing their work through the use front and rear projection screens, video and C U See Me software.

The laboratory's first exhibition, "Looking for the Pieces," honors Isis, the Egyptian goddess of healing and the earth and moon. Brown, 24, who also owns AB Photography Studios in West Branch, says the inspiration for the entire project came from statue of Isis that is located on the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library grounds in West Branch.

The statue was created by the Belgium artist Auguste Puttemans and given to Hoover in 1922 for his efforts to feed starving Belgium children and soldiers during World War I.

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**Adam Brown, curator
Isis Conceptual
Laboratory**

Brown's exhibition space, which is named after the sculpture, connects the gallery with the presidential library-museum and the community of West Branch. "I want this to be a very community-oriented space," says Brown.

"We call this place a 'laboratory' because galleries are too intimidating and because we are experimenting. We

want people to come to explore," he adds.

The laboratory also has a small space for performing artists.

Brown says the space was his idea, but the whole project was a collaborative effort of the Isis Board of Directors.

University of Iowa Anthropology and African American Studies professor and board member Allen Roberts suggested using the figure as the centerpiece for the gallery. "It presents so many opportunities for thinking about secrecy and what is or isn't revealed in art," says Roberts of the veiled Puttemans statue.

Just four months ago Brown got the space on Main Street for the facility which has attracted some internationally-known artists including Karen Gunderson, Les Levine and Lucio Pozzi.

According to Roberts, Hans Breder, head of the U of I Art Department, is the central person for making it happen, with Brown coordinating the efforts. "It is remarkable how the artists that Hans and Adam contacted were so interested that they immediately sat down and made something," he adds.

Each piece in the installation was made specifically for this opening exhibit.

The artists are all acquaintances of Breder, who has been an inspiration and mentor for Brown.

Brown, who holds an art degree from the U of I and calls himself a conceptual artist and curator, is planning future installations all tied to the myth of Isis and secrecy.

Opening a gallery with ties to Isis in the small community of West Branch and the Hoover Presidential Library-Museum is visionary, according to David Dunlap, U of I professor of art and Isis board member. "He knows what he is doing. He has selected this image and that name to represent his gallery. At the same time he is very definitely a part of the community like anyone else on main street.

"It is possible for a gallery, now more than ever, to be located physically anywhere because of the Internet," he adds.

Brown predicts the importance of large cities will diminish. "With Internet you can be international. Someone in Japan can see this space without ever having to leave home."

Brown has established a Web Site for the laboratory

which allows people from other countries to visit and view the art in the West Branch on the Internet.

Roberts says there is a lot of potential to do future installations all tied to the Isis myth. "There is the possibility to really do something interesting for the local community that will pull West Branch and Iowa City together and have local and international connections as well."

Several of the artists in the show have indicated an interest to visit West Branch to create other individual shows.

In just two hours on opening night the mixed-media exhibition which includes sculpture, photography, painting as well as video and interactive computer installation, drew over 200 people from eastern Iowa. Brown says he has

received good support from the community. "But I don't think they knew what to expect."

He hopes that some of the 80,000 to 100,000 annual Presidential Library visitors will also visit downtown West Branch to "explore" art at the laboratory and support local businesses.

All the art exhibited in "Looking for the Pieces" is for sale. Brown says, "I want to find really good homes for this work." The artist will receive half of the proceeds, the other half will be donated to the non-profit Isis organization to help fund future exhibits.

The laboratory, located at 104 E. Main Street in West Branch, opens Wednesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free.