

AROUND TOWN

Glass 3: An International Exhibition — Three collectives of glass artists — the Washington Glass School, Cohesion Artists of Sunderland, England, and artists selected by the Arts Commission of Greater Toldedo — join forces to show their (metaphorical) castles made of (melted) sand. **The Shops at Georgetown Park**

PEACE NOW! — Sondra N. Arkin and Beth Baldwin's Checkpoint Installation is one of most striking pieces of in this 40-artist anti-war showcase. Sadly, this will be the final exhibit at the Warehouse before it closes its doors this spring. **Warehouse** — *Chris Klimek*



Dead trees are the future of advertising

By Chris Klimek
Special to The Examiner

If you want to design a poster but find inspiration lacking, John Foster has some guidance for you: "If you run out of ideas, just put a big face on it. It always helps."

Foster's advice is worth hearing even when he's speaking with tongue implanted in cheek. The vice president of Creative for the Alexandria-based design firm Fuszion and the author of "New Masters of Poster Design," Foster knows a thing or four about what's likely to catch the eye: a strong central image is key, as is expressive typography.

Foster's done design work for clients from Pepsi to CNN, but the posters he makes to promote and commemorate concerts by the likes of Grizzly Bear, VooTrot and Mercury Rev remain one of his key passions. He'll speak on the topic of the music poster past and present at the University of Maryland Wednesday afternoon, part of the current exhibition, Sweet: The Graphic Beauty of the Contemporary Rock Poster. Besides Foster's work, the show features contributions by internationally celebrated designers Jesse LeDoux, Diana Sudyka and Jason Munn, as well as local creators such as Anthony Dille and Jeffrey Everett.

"Poster making is going through a renaissance," Foster says. "You've got Starbucks and Target using the poster as their main messaging device. In Starbucks, there are posters of their products throughout the stores."

Similarly, music fans have driven a resurgence in the "gig poster," turning limited-edition, show-specific posters into sought-after collectibles. Handmade silkscreen posters like the ones Foster creates are issued in limited runs and typically sell at shows for \$25 and up. With their arresting permutations of color, graphics and typography, they can have an aesthetic value distinct from the music that inspires them. But they still allow fans to identify themselves with the bands they love in the same way concert T-shirts do. "Somebody can walk into your dorm room and see your Decembrists poster," says Foster, "and they know a lot about you right away."

If you go

Sweet: *The Graphic Beauty of the Contemporary Rock Poster at the Art Gallery, University of Maryland*

- » **When:** Through March 29, 2008 (closed March 17-22) Including: Lecture by John Foster, Wednesday, March 5, 3 p.m.
- » **Where:** The Art Gallery, 1202 Art-Sociology Building, University of Maryland, College Park
- » **Admission:** Free
- » **More info:** 301-405-2763; art-gallery.umd.edu

"Erykah Badu" by David Scheinbaum, 2002.

Portraiture, Remixed



"Mule" by Jefferson Pinder, 2006.



"Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five" by Kehinde Wiley, 2005.

By Chris Klimek
Special to The Examiner

In 1992, Mark Seliger shot a Rolling Stone cover of then-controversial rapper Ice-T wearing a police uniform and brandishing a nightstick. Time Warner, the parent company of Ice-T's record label, had been made the subject of a shame campaign after an Ice-T side project called Body Count released an album featuring the song "Cop Killer." By dressing the focal point of all this public outrage as a cop — holding a nightstick, less than a year after the country watched Rodney King get bludgeoned to a pulp by three uniformed Los Angeles policemen — Seliger caught the zeitgeist in a bottle.

Pretty great portrait. But I like Kehinde Wiley's painting of Ice-T, styled after Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' 1806 "Portrait of Napoleon on His Imperial Throne," almost as much. Now that Ice is 50 years old and probably more famous for his role on "Law & Order" — as a cop! — than for his music, the regal trappings suit him.

The Wiley is one of several paintings of hip-hop gentry (LL Cool J, Grandmaster Flash) rendered in the aggrandizing style for which monied personages of centuries past paid a premium. (VH-1 picked up the tab

in this case, commissioning Wiley to paint the recipients of their 2005 Hip Hop Honors.) They're arguably the best part of RECOGNIZE! Hip and Contemporary Portraiture, a show that manages the not-so-easy job of making the National Portrait Gallery feel, well, contemporary. It's a little perverse that in a show that uses such an admirably loose definition of portraiture, the works modeled after an antiquated style are also the ones that resonate most.

To be fair, the other elements of the show are all worthy: D.C. artists Tim Conlon and Dave Hupp have tagged one hallway of the gallery with their vibrant graffiti art. David Scheinbaum's crisp black-and-white photos capture hip-hop artists in performance, mostly in 2002 and mostly at Albuquerque's Sunshine Theatre. An audio recording of activist-educator Nikki Giovanni read-

ing her poem "It's Not Just a Situation" shares a gallery with "No Thief to Blame," a Shinique Smith installation the NPG commissioned to accompany Giovanni's verses.

Jefferson Pinder's three short films are a kind of self-portraiture, albeit with the artist casting himself as a kind of every(black)man. In "Mule," he drags a heavy log strapped to his body down the street, while "The Invisible Man" finds him standing in a room full of lightbulbs, gradually brightening as the screen changes from pitch black to blinding white. To frame them in musical terms, Pinder's movies are like the Public Enemy albums of the 1980s, or 21st-century recordings by rappers such as Boots Riley (of The Coup) or RhymeFest: They make their political points without compromising their artistry.

Despite that analogy, RECOGN-

"Ice T" by Kehinde Wiley, 2005.



If you go

- » **When:** Through October 26, 2008
- » **Where:** National Portrait Gallery, Eighth and F streets northwest
- » **Admission:** Free
- » **More information:** 202-633-8300; npg.si.edu

NIZE! doesn't try to offer a comprehensive overview of hip-hop, either as a musical genre or as a cultural exponent of slang, attitude and dress. It wisely keeps itself to only seven artists, which allows it to achieve a clear perspective despite its catch-all moniker.

Still, Wiley's work stands out among all the rest, finding oblique inspiration in the oft-cited objection to hip-hop that so much of the lyrical content is made up of simple boasts about the artist's wealth, possessions, performing skill or sexual prowess. Through their lyrical "flow," rappers have always done for themselves what the wealthy and powerful of eras past generations hired portrait painters to do for them — assert their primacy before the world. It's the explicitness with which Wiley's monumental portraits make that connection that makes them feel so vital.

"Painting, by and large, has to do with a type of propaganda act, and the propaganda propagated in this work has to do with dominance," Wiley told Brandon Fortune, a curator at the NPG, in an interview last month. "In some sense, I'm sort of interrogating the notion of the alpha-male subject of painting."

Interrogating is a good word for what RECOGNIZE! does. Vibrant on the surface and inquisitive beneath, it's a bracing blast of fresh air.