

'How in a world gilt with love May I thank you above this human cadence'

Studio to host open show inspired by poem

THE ART STUDIO, INC. is offering artists an opportunity to participate in a group show in October. Artists are invited to produce a piece inspired by the lines:

**How in a world gilt with love
May I thank you above this human cadence**

This will also be the title of the show.

"For several years we have played with the idea of a group show where all the work is inspired by a common theme or idea," tenant Andy Coughlan said. "The schedule worked such that we could finally do it, with enough lead time for people to produce the work."

Elizabeth French, TASI assistant director, said

the lines are by long-time Studio member George Wentz, a well-known artist and poet, who died last year.

"George submitted poems to the ISSUE consistently since it was first published," French said. "It seemed appropriate to use something he wrote."

Artists are asked to commit to entry by June 1, with the work to be delivered to The Art Studio by Sept. 1. There is no cost to enter the show, but entrants are expected to be members of The Art Studio. Memberships begin at \$35 per year. Memberships should be purchased by June.

"We want the contributors to have plenty of time to really think about what they want to do, how the words resonate with them," French said. "But we

also need to plan ahead so we can work out the space. That's why we are asking for artists to commit in June."

In order to have a consistent theme, 2-dimensional work should not exceed 24x30 inches. Sculptures should not exceed 30 inches in any direction. Limit one piece per person.

"This is really an exciting project," Coughlan said. "Art is such a subjective thing and I expect a really diverse body of work, one that will illustrate the wide variety of styles and interpretations that are possible."

The lines were selected to afford the widest possible interpretations.

For more information, call 409-838-5393.

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glass cover, looking like a saintly relic displayed in a precious reliquary.

This ethereal image is confronted with a gigantic sculpture titled Dog which is positioned in the center of the gallery facing the altarpiece. The creature looks more like a mythological chimera, a hybrid that defies identification, than a dog. Although made of the same lightweight materials, it looks heavy and, strangely for an abstract piece, anatomically detailed. One critic compared Smits's sculptures to "anatomical figures which were an essential tool for classical artists and medical practitioners: the figures that exposed the anatomy of muscle beneath the skin."

If Dog equals God in Smits' symbolic system, the twenty-first century God must be the god of recycling.

The canine imagery permeates Smits's work. Since God/Dog created man in his image, there is no surprise that Adam and Eve are portrayed with canine heads and paws. Their figures loom large on each side of the altarpiece, to emphasize "the importance and influence of humans is our world." The lineage of the various breeds of the dog family tree is superimposed over the paintings of the panels, the circles simultaneously looking like the planets in the solar system.

While The Altarpiece acts mostly as a "tabula rasa" waiting to be filled with the viewer's own thoughts, another work in the exhibition titled, "The Adoration of the Mystic Dog," offers an insight into the artist's mind. Comprised of sixty smaller panels and arranged in tiers, it is the artist's vision of the world developed in reference to the van Eyck brothers' harmo-

nious hierarchy portrayed in their 1432 altarpiece. The dichotomy of heaven and earth is still present, although the upper tier panels originally occupied by Christ, Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist are empty. Floating beneath them is planet Earth represented by the continents which are identified only by name. The earthly life is shown as a series of panels containing fragments of barely recognizable objects, such as dog's limbs morphing into the arms of Adam and Eve or an outline of a dead dog. "Going to the Dogs" reads an inscription on one of the panels. "Think" reads another one.

Nothing is fixed and immutable in Smits's interpretation of van Eyck's altarpiece, she engages the viewer in a constant exploration and re-thinking of the medieval masterpiece as well as the world around us. As she expressed in an interview, "My ultimate dream is that my work sparks something off in people—that they recognize something in it. But it's also a way for me to try to grasp the essence of what intrigues me. By making work you discover things you hadn't been aware of."

¹The Benelux is an economic union in Western Europe that comprises three neighboring countries, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.

²Maria Smits, Statement for the exhibition "Adoration of the Mystic Dog," Lawndale Art Center, Houston, Nov. 19, 20010-Jan. 16, 2011.

³Susan Benofy, Adoremus Bulletin, Online Edition - Vol. VIII, No. 9: December 2002 - January 2003

⁴The van Eycks' altarpiece is considered to be the earliest example of nudity in Flemish art.

⁵Maria Smits, Statement.

⁶J. Bolten-Rempt, Bare Existence exhibition catalogue, 2009.

⁷Maria Smits, Statement for the exhibition "Adoration of the Mystic Dog," Lawndale Art Center, Houston, Nov. 19, 2010 - Jan. 16, 2011.

⁸Koos Tuijter, interview with Maria Smith in: Bare Existence, exhibition catalogue, 2009.



Maria Smits, **THE MYSTIC DOG**, 2010. Polystyrene, foam rubber and plastic binders
Courtesy of the Artist