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Artful competition

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY MARY HELEN MASKILL

Adela Andrea takes a photograph of her installation -- a web of colorful cold cathode lights and computer fans -- Tuesday at the Wichita Falls Museum of Art at Midwestern State University. The installation, called "Biopunk Mnemonics," is one of 72 artworks entered into the "Texas Oklahoma Art Prize" competition and exhibit, which opens with a reception Friday at the museum.

Texas art might be bluebonnets.

But it's also green, red and blue neon lights joyfully splayed in directions hither and thither as they form a spider-web network of sorts, while computer fans, caught in the glowing web, whir and buzz, whir and buzz, whir and buzz ...

Oklahoma art may be Rolling Plains, American Indians, red dirt and endless skies.

But it's also framed maps representative of the year 1895 with butterfly motifs and crumbles of rock — granite, maybe? — on the floor at their feet.

Webs of glowing neon, framed 1895 maps — they're just two of 72 pieces of work entered in the "Texas Oklahoma Art Prize," a biennial competition and exhibition by Texas and Oklahoma artists. The competition, which debuted in 2008 at the Wichita Falls Museum of Art, is designed to support regional art and help the Midwestern State University facility establish itself as a premier regional museum.

The exhibit opens with a reception from 6-9 p.m. Friday, when awards will be given for the best work by a Texas artist, the best work by an Oklahoma artist and the best overall work in the show, as chosen by juror Janis Goodman, professor of fine art at Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, D.C. Winners receive \$1,000 prizes, except for the big award, the \$2,000 Texas Oklahoma Art Prize.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY MARY HELEN MASKILL

Adela Andrea, an artist from Conroe, Texas, was at the Wichita Falls Museum of Art at Midwestern State University Tuesday to install her entry, called "Biopunk Mnemonics," into the "Texas Oklahoma Art Prize" competition and exhibition. The neon web of cold cathode lights is just one of 72

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artworks featured in the competition.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY MARY HELEN MASKILL

"Biopunk Mnemonics" by Adela Andrea of Houston is one of several installations in the "Texas Oklahoma Art Prize" exhibit and competition at the Wichita Falls Museum of Art at MSU. The biennial competition and exhibit opens with a reception Friday.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY MARY HELEN MASKILL @CUTLINES NO RULE. JONATHAN HILS, AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF SCULPTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, INSTALLS &

About four times as many entries are in this year's competition compared to the inaugural "Art Prize" in 2008. Ninety-five artists sent in digital images of 250 pieces of work that were whittled down to the 72 in the show.

"I think the word just got around," said Museum Education Specialist Mary Helen Maskill of the number of entries this year. She knows artist friends of the museum spread the word about the competition.

Taking in the oodles of artwork scattered about the museum's galleries as they're being set up for Friday's opening, it's easy to feel like a kid in a candy store.

"It's just a wide range of work, from a first-time photographer to Karl Umlauf, one of the most prolific Texas artists," said Maskill.

Some of the eye-wowing works are installations, such as the web of computer fans and neon stick lights, actually cold cathode lights. It glows in one dark corner of the museum and is by Conroe, Texas, artist Adela Andrea.

There's also the installation of 1895 maps by Yiren Gallager of Tulsa, Okla.

Sculptures in the competition range from an outdoor basket-weaved wire sculpture made of welded and powder-coated steel, called "Vinculum," by Jonathan Hills, an associate professor of sculpture at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, and a sculpture by Andy Myers of Irving, Texas, that looks a bit like "The

Thinker," except it's made out of twining branches. It's called "As An Oak Remains."

Also included is a sculpture of a giant typewriter by David Phelps of Oklahoma City.

Visitors will see a little red tricycle whose seat and a few other parts have been replaced by fragmented cast glass.

And traditional 2-D works fill the galleries, as well, such as by B.C. Gilbert of Wichita Falls, who submitted a color-imbued, very West Texas piece with cowboy images, and Katherine Liontas-Warren of Lawton, Okla., whose drawing includes a little-house-on-the-prairie image reflective of her home state of Oklahoma.

What Maskill loves about this exhibit is not only the vast spectrum of work but being able to see some of the cutting-edge techniques among artists.

"There are a few new techniques to see, like ultrachrome," she said. It is being used by at least one of the photographers in the show. And there's one work that's a photograph on silk.

Danny Bills, museum curator, said what he likes about this year's "Texas Oklahoma Art Prize" is that it validates the exhibits and collections work the Wichita Falls Museum of Art has done over the last few years, since many of the artists in the show have been featured at the museum previously.



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Artists like Katherine Liontas-Warren, Brian Johnson of Austin and John Hartley of Fort Worth, whose works are included in the “Texas Oklahoma Art Prize,” have shown pieces in past Wichita Falls Museum of Art exhibits.

“We have 7 to 12 artists that have shown here before,” he said, quite a few of them in the “Texas Twelve” exhibit, which spotlighted 12 emerging artists in the state.

Features

In fact, Bills added, “One of the real interesting things about it is we have this ‘New Acquisitions’ exhibit on display ... Five of the artists represented in ‘New Acquisitions’ got into this show ... So, if a juror who’s not from here can recognize the quality of that work, that’s great.

“I feel like we’re making good decisions,” he said.

After the opening reception Friday, the “Texas Oklahoma Art Prize” exhibit can be viewed through May 29.

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