

Alumna exhibit celebrates teaching, artistry

By Susan Wittstock

As an artist, Ohio State alumna Melinda Kay works in mixed media, taking common objects like twigs, rags or marbles, and arranging them to reveal their beauty. As a teacher, Kay works with students, taking their interests, skills and creativity, and developing them to reveal their artistry.

Both aspects of Kay's career are on display for the exhibition *Melinda Kay: Dual Decades*, showing in Hopkins Hall Gallery & Corridor through Feb. 18. The gallery displays a variety of Kay's artwork dating back to her time as a Master of Fine Arts student, a degree she earned in 1984. The lobby and corridor display the artwork of students from Thomas Worthington High School, where Kay has taught art since 1986.

She is enjoying the chance to come back to her alma mater, where she also earned a bachelor's degree in art education in 1980. "I feel like a cycle has been completed. I'm coming back as a mature artist to the place where I started," she said.

This exhibit has given Kay an opportunity to see works from different periods of her life together in the same room. "I can see the connections that I hadn't realized were there."

In one of her earliest pieces, she combines a plastic flower with feathers bursting out from a simple wood frame. A recent work features sheaths of corn encased in polyester casting resin with pages from a book on comparative religion, also displayed within a simple wood frame.

"I'm celebrating things not usually given much credence, be it sticks off the ground or plastic flowers," she said. "I'm now doing the same thing, but in a different way, and that's after years and years of doing art without images."

In some of the years in between, Kay's work shifted to experimentation with shape: tall, narrow wooden shields with gentle curves that she said represent to her the strong powerful elements of a female soul;



By Jo McCully

Ohio State alumna Melinda Kay works with 11th grader Angela Arnold during an advanced ceramics class at Thomas Worthington High School.

stained and finished wood segments that jut the figure into and out of space with subtle angles; and curved apostrophe-shaped figures that dip toward each other like a brightly painted yin and yang.

The act of creating art "seems to give me back something, a spiritual satisfaction," she said. "Not in a religious sense, but that there's a wonderment in life I get to participate in."

Her work as an artist may help her to have empathy for her students' struggle to create. "I find art doesn't come easily. It's part of a long process. What's exciting is the getting close, the struggle inside of me to see what the material will become. It's very rewarding."

It's satisfying to Kay to be able to have her school's student work displayed for this exhibition. "It's special. Very, very special. We thought it was a great idea. The whole art department is excited, and so are the students,"

Student artwork in a variety of forms — ceramics, metalsmithing, painting, sketches — is displayed for the show, as well as quotes from the students discussing what the art means to them.

"We're trying to bring to light the studio process at the high school level," Kay said. "We're showing teacher intent, student response and process sketches. The show is celebrating the student experience with as much depth as possible."

Kay said she doesn't tend to think of her work as a studio artist overlapping with her work as a teacher. "Often times, I feel that in the high school setting, people are largely unaware that I'm an artist," Kay said.

She does consider her lesson plans in light of her own work as an artist, though. "When I'm planning and evaluating my teaching, I'm always thinking, 'Is what I'm

the arts

as an artist?" Sometimes what I do as an educator isn't as free as what I'd give myself, but as students, I may need to give them more of the process."

Currently, Kay is teaching ceramics, a field she had no experience in until she took courses in order to start teaching it a few years ago. "I wouldn't have done that without teaching," she said.

Over the years, her school has been supportive of her art career, by allowing her to teach part-time and by providing a steady income. She's quick to point out, though, that she loves teaching for its own sake. "I love teaching. I don't teach to do my artwork. They're two equally valuable things to me."

In Columbus, Kay is represented by Gallery V, and has work in the collections of The Huntington Mortgage Co., Nationwide Insurance Co. and Columbus Public Libraries. She has been the recipient of numerous grants from the Ohio Arts Council and the Greater Columbus Arts Council.

She likes the common ground this show is finding for her two careers. "I don't really think I'm combining them, but at times like this, it is really coming together," she said. "It's very exciting when one profession builds on the other."

Dual Decades is the fifth biennial Alumni Exhibition. "The exhibit really shows what happens in your career after you leave here," said Prudence Gill, curator of the Hopkins Hall Gallery & Corridor. "Melinda has made a real commitment to teaching as well as to her own work."

The exhibit is funded by the Bevlyn Simson Painting Exhibition Fund, with support from the departments of Art and Art Education, the Hopkins Hall Gallery & Corridor, and the Wexner Center Education