

Artist's 'Aesthetic' Events Defy Labels

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In the west Denver home of artist John Fudge is a mock fire-alarm box made by his wife, Jane. The instructions read, "In case of aesthetic experience, break glass."

Such experiences must be common there because the house includes Fudge's studio. He creates enigmatic oil paintings that just earned him \$5,000 in the 1976 Visual Arts Fellowship Program of the Western States Arts Foundation.

The foundation got 747 applications from its 10 member states: Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, Idaho, Oregon, Montana and Washington. One winner was named in each of them.

FUDGE SAID HE DISLIKES competitions because of the paperwork "and usually you've only got a chance in a million. Jane talked me into entering. She filled out the papers and I got the slides together."

Currently an assistant professor of art at the University of Colorado at Denver, Fudge said the award money will let him spend the summer of 1977 painting with no teaching duties.

He also may take his first trip to the East Coast to visit museums and galleries. He has been represented at the Walker Street Gallery in New York City but said a change is likely.

Born 35 years ago in Iowa, Fudge has lived in Denver since he was 8. He earned two degrees in art at CU and

taught two years at the University of Arizona at Tucson. He joined the CU faculty in 1970.

FUDGE FEELS IT IS important for artists to exhibit in New York, especially since "galleries here (in Denver) rise and fall like dandelions." But he considers Denver a "terrific" place to live.

"It's not an art center, he said, "but it's a crossroads. I feel in touch. At CU you can meet people from all over the world."

Fudge's work defies tidy labels. "Surrealism probably comes closest," he said. "I think of it as realism in the sense that there isn't anything nowadays that couldn't happen. And humor is a big element."

A look through his studio revealed two paintings entitled "You'd Better Watch Out." The one shown on this page is a parody of sorts on Titian's "Bacchus and Ariadne." Another features a mean-looking Santa Claus as a nose gunner in a plane. ("I hate Christmas," Fudge observed.)

OTHER PAINTINGS RANGE from menacing to erotic. A prehistoric-looking creature bites the foot of a man in jail wearing a Nazi uniform. A one-eyed nude pours tea al fresco. A child calmly bathes a werewolf. Two pinups in black lace flaunt chains and leather.

"I think my pictures annoy some people, and other people get a laugh out of them," Fudge said. "I'm not trying to shock — I don't think it's possible to shock people with art any more."

He said he painted abstractions in school, "and I learned a lot about using paint that way. But ultimately I got bored. I was more interested in subject matter.

"IT WAS REALLY a relief when Pop art came along. Abstract had been so serious. At least with Pop you could get a laugh and not just be impressed. Abstract painting really appeals mostly to other painters."

Fudge's favorite American artist is Edward Hopper. He also admires the Belgian surrealist Magritte, Duchamp, Velasquez, Goya and Vermeer.

THE WESTERN STATES competition jury included Roy Butler, manager of Clay Center Colorado in Denver; Ron Hickman, director of the Phoenix Art Museum, and Joan Brown of the University of California at Berkeley.



Denver Post Photo by Ernie Leyba

DENVER ARTIST JOHN FUDGE WITH 'YOU'D BETTER WATCH OUT'
His oil paintings earned him \$5,000 in 10-state foundation competition.