



Kirk Williams will exhibit art works like this lawn sculpture at the Center for the Arts beginning next week. (Journal photo by Coleen Neumann)

Artist brings his fanciful creations to downtown exhibit

By COLEEN NEUMANN
Staff Writer

There's something mythical about Kirk Williams' art. His prehistoric sea creatures and gnome-like characters have a surreal nature that's both whimsical and mysterious.

But that's to be expected when you realize his favorite subjects are "things with snails and shells and creepy-crawlers."

You've maybe seen Williams' bronze sculptures of sealife with human faces at community college invitational shows. But the exhibit that goes up next week at the Center for the Arts for two weeks will be his first private show. Opening night activities begin at 7 p.m. Monday. Some of his works will be for sale.

Williams works with a variety of media — pastels, inks, gouache and watercolors, oils, acrylic, sculpture and ceramics.

"The basis for all this is pencil. Pencil, that's my catalyst for all this work," Williams said gesturing toward the art decorating his home on the Sophus Anderson Road.

"What I like is, you pick out a medium and a subject and you keep changing," Williams said. "I guess it's a search."

The search never ends in "absolute satisfaction," William

said, but spurs the self-taught artist on to more attempts.

Often, he said, he'll look back on a work he's completed and realize what it was he was trying to create. But while he's working on a subject, he says, "It's like you're in the play, but you can't see the play itself."

The Fergus Falls native did have formal training in commercial art and attended the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. But he says he rejected a career in commercial art and became "my own teacher."

"I learned the hard way," Williams says. Learning his technique of cold-bronze casting, for example, required months of trial-and-error.

Williams will work two to three months on a sculpture. He begins with sculpting clay. He then applies layers and layers of latex on top of the clay form for the mold. A "cradle mold" of plaster presses down on the latex. After the mold is dry, it is used for the bronze casting. The bronze piece is then allowed to oxidize, turn green with copper sulfide, in an aging process.

While Williams' formal training is evident in the detailed nature of his work, Williams takes pride in the freedom of his style.

"I take from nature and I take from myself," he said. He explained he doesn't concentrate on merely reproducing subjects but allows what he sees to "go into the eye, through the heart and out the hand."

Williams' love of art extends into his work as a human services technician with the mentally retarded at the state hospital. He's worked on his own time teaching art techniques to some residents. One of his goals was to feature the art works of state hospital residents in a special exhibit.

Another of Williams' dreams is to create an underwater sculpture garden. An avid scuba diver, Williams has tried planting one of his sculptures of a man-fish in a local lake. He said the water added an even more eerie nature to the mythological form.

But not all Williams art conjures up mystical connections. Some of it's just plain fun. One of his most recent works uses chocolate as the medium for his fascination with lizards, frogs and snails.

"Chocolate lizards. They have such a ring," Williams said. "I thought, why don't I do something weird?"

The sweet reptiles will be included in Williams' show.