

Chinese acrobats flip through town

After missing out on other acrobatic acts, Truman welcomes the Shangri-La

Naomi Davis
Staff Reporter

The Kohlenberg Lyceum series presented the Shangri-La Chinese Acrobats on Tuesday to a sold-out crowd of students, faculty and the Kirksville community.

The audience watched as the 14 performers leapt and twisted themselves into positions and configurations whose names speak for themselves: "The Human Pyramid," "Unicycle Bowl Balancing," and "Colorful Contortionists."

Bob Jones, co-chair of the Kohlenberg Lyceum series committee and dean of fine arts, said the act reflected the aspect of diversity the Lyceum series attempts to provide.

"Primarily, the Lyceum committee likes to have diversity in the kinds of acts we bring," Jones said. "Whether play, ballet or symphony and also in diversity among the performer."

The acrobatic act, which features entertainers aged 18 to 24, books its performers directly from China, producer Don Hughes said.

"These acrobats are not new at what they do," Hughes said. "They are here year-round, well-rehearsed and very professional, going home only two or three weeks a year to see their families."

Hughes said most Chinese acrobats have been training since age 6. When students show talent, they are recommended to continue their craft at a professional school, where they meet with artistic directors and booking agents, becoming professionals by age 10.

Hughes, along with the group's artistic director, Kem Hai, is responsible for the booking, producing and business aspects of the acrobatic act. Hughes said Hai travels to China several times a year to scout out and sign new acrobats. He said he has been working with Hai in the acrobat business since the two met in 1973.

"The Hai Family from China, whose expertise directing and leading the Shangri-La Chinese Acrobats for over 20 years, has met with great success and standing ovations across North America and around the world," according to a press release. "In acrobatic circles, the family name Hai (pronounced 'hi') is highly respected and synonymous with physical feats of daring and skill across Asia."

The production company recommends the audience read a study guide on Chinese culture before and after the show, provided by www.chineseacrobats.com. Among the topics to be read after the show were, "If Chinese theatre is an illusion of life, which part of the performance illustrated struggle; which part illustrated joy?" And, "Consider Chinese Acrobatics as an art form. What Western (European, American, Latin, etc.) art forms are similar to Chinese Acrobatics, and why are they similar?"

Jones said recruiting diverse acts to campus has proven to be problematic in the past, and difficulties with passports and visas can prevent certain international acts from coming. Jones said he and Winston Vanderhoof, co-chairman of the Lyceum committee, go through a long selection process for the year's events. Contact agents are responsible for submitting information on tours and available dates for various groups, in accordance with the budget committee. The last acrobatic act seen on Truman's campus was the Peking Acrobats in 2001, co-sponsored by the Lyceum series and the Student Activities Board.



The Shangri-La Chinese Acrobats features performers ages 18 to 24 who are booked directly from the People's Republic of China. They performed Tuesday night in Baldwin Auditorium to a sold-out crowd.

"We missed out on an acrobatic act once," Jones said. "And once on a Chinese ballet that had already been booked because the group didn't have passports."

Jones said that in recent years even more proposed acts have been unable to come because of the condition of Baldwin Auditorium.

"The lighting and sound systems are outdated," he said. "We haven't been able to accommodate certain acts."

The Shangri-La acrobats made a couple of changes on their technical rider and were able to work with the auditorium. The group's contract rider states not only the technical necessities for the performance, but also the treatment and behavioral standards of the performers.

"The Shangri-La Chinese Acrobats consist of acrobats from the People's Republic of China," the rider states. "Their tradition is to do everything together. The troupe lives as a family unit. If there is a social function, they should all be invited. It is considered impolite to single out certain members for special treatment."

The group's tight coordination reflects not only the physical dynamic of the performers, but also the relationships with one another, Hughes said.

"They're like a family," he said. "They're not blood-related, but acrobats and circus performers watch out for each other."

Hughes said the performers would be unavailable for an interview, as they speak only Chinese. Aside from other live performances, the Shangri-La acrobats can be seen once again on a TV appearance recently filmed with Nickelodeon's "Unfabulous," scheduled to air some time in the coming year.

Chinese Acrobat Facts

- Records of acrobatic acts can be found as early as the Ch'in Dynasty (221 B.C. to 207 B.C.)

- Chinese acrobatics are an evolving folk art form because tradition demands that each generation of acrobats add its own improvements and embellishments.

- Because of the unusual and difficult nature of the feats involved, high honor is conferred upon those skilled enough to become acrobats.

- An acrobat can be considered the Chinese equivalent of an American opera star.

Source: www.chineseacrobats.com



"Dead Mouse" by Billie Grace Lynn is displayed in the University Art Gallery in Ophelia Parrish now until Nov. 22.

Art inflates gallery

Student and professional artists create artwork that can be expanded for exhibit

Alicia Collins
Staff Reporter

A 45-foot dead mouse is within five minutes of each residence hall, and admission is free.

"Dead Mouse" by Billie Grace Lynn, along with other pieces of nontraditional art, are on display in the University Art Gallery until Nov. 22 as part of "Dimensions Variable: An Exhibition of Expandable Sculpture," organized by gallery director Aaron Fine and James Pauls, professor of art.

The goal of the exhibition was to fill the gallery with pieces of artwork that could be shipped small. Work was shipped according to standard UPS weights and measurements to save money but expanded in some way so they were large when installed, Fine said.

"We knew we had a challenge here because we have such a big gallery, and it really demands big sculptures but we're in such a remote location it would be hard to get them here," he said.

Fine said the organizers of the exhibit were looking for pieces that might inflate, unfold, stack or interconnect so they expanded upon installation. Artists from across the nation received requests to submit proposals, and out of nearly 70 proposals, 10 were chosen.

"We started talking about this exhibit a year ago because we wanted to bring large sculptures to Kirksville, and we wanted a really professional show with artists from around the nation," he said.

Fine said the inspirations for the artwork in this exhibit vary from children's construction toys, to engineering issues such as how bridges stand up, to modular furniture that people construct themselves.

For those wishing to personally experience the exhibit, Legos and other tinker toys are available at the exhibit to create personal expandable art.

"There was a really wide range of influences on this particular exhibit," he said. "When the artists submitted the work, it had more of a pop-art influence than we had originally intended as well as an installation art influence."

Every piece has its own interpretation

depending on the person viewing it and how it is installed, Fine said.

"I think it's a show that really affects all kinds of people, and everyone is going to have a different reaction to it because their daily lives are so different," he said.

Pauls said he alone spent nearly 12 hours setting up the exhibit, as some of the pieces did not arrive until a few days before opening night. Other problems such as misunderstandings of how certain pieces were to be displayed also occurred.

"There were some problems that we did not anticipate, such as pieces being broken in transit, or things are thought to have been worked out that actually aren't," he said.

The main gallery contains artwork from artists all around the nation, but the smaller side gallery has similar pieces made by University students in Pauls' Design II class, 3-D art.

Pauls said the same parameters given to the artists were given to the students who submitted proposals. From those parameters, the students were instructed to create a sculpture that could expand, stack, inflate or increase in size upon installation in another way.

"The whole idea is that of the process as well as the thought," he said.

Junior James Schierman, a visual communication major, is one of the artists whose work is on display in the side gallery of the exhibit.

"Initially I was stunned when the assignment was given, but this is a normal response to any one of Professor Pauls' assignments," he said. "They seem sort of intense at first, but then you come up with ideas to tackle the problem, and things start to move along smoothly."

Schierman said the assignment was difficult because of the restrictions, but every project has its own personal difficulties that challenge the artist.

"This is the life of an art major, and we all learn to adapt to this," he said.

Schierman said he always wanted to make a catapult, so he found a way to make his idea work for this assignment.

"I think it's neat that Design II students have the chance to display some of their work in the gallery," he said. "It's always nice to be able to show some of your work to the public."

The gallery hours are 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and 12 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday.

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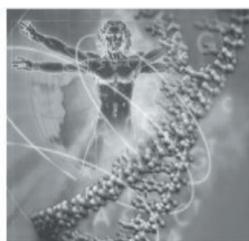
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