

Profile of an artist

by Jason Wolf

Aribert Munzner has been painting and drawing since he was about 10 years old. He sold his first painting in 1953. He graduated from one of the best art schools in the United States. He's been teaching art since 1955. He's displayed his works in galleries and museums all over the country. But the 67-year old artist says his career as an artist is just beginning.

A diminutive man who sports a gray and black beard, Munzner believes that his career is only starting to hit its stride because of a changing worldwide pathos. He says the 1990's is an exciting era for artists. "I think a planetary consciousness is starting to be formed," he says. Due to modern technology, "for the first time ever, people are aware of each other and everything that's going on everywhere on the planet," he says. As an artist, Munzner tries to express those neo-globalist views in his work.

Munzner's career is also still in the infant stages because he only recently started devoting his full attention to his art. It's only been a few years since Munzner moved out of the studio in his Wedge home to a large warehouse studio in a Minneapolis suburb. There, he lives the artists life he always wanted to lead; he works from 9 p.m. until dawn without any distractions.

At age 9, Munzner learned English from comic books when his family emigrated to Alton, New York from Germany to escape the Nazis. He earned his Eagle Scout award while in high school in , where his father was a physician.

Munzner graduated with a bachelor of fine arts from Syracuse University, where he says he didn't learn a thing. "I learned all I know about art from sitting in Greenwich Village and listening to jazz," he says. But he continued his education at the prestigious Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Mich. For his senior thesis, he wrote what he says is the shortest paper in the

college's history, a three-page essay entitled "Art Cannot be Taught," which landed him a job on the faculty at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1955.

Munzner, who retired as the dean of the faculty at MCAD in 1994, has no idea how to describe the type of art he does. When pressed, he suggests that he practices "abstract scientific mysticism."

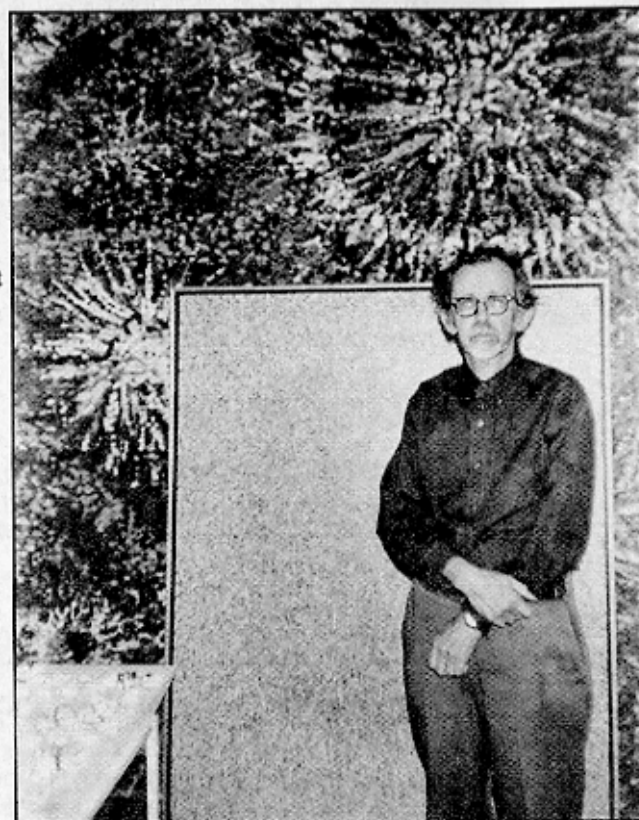
Perhaps he has so much trouble pinpointing his artistic style because he just doesn't fit any established mold. After all, every one of the thousands of works he has produced has the same name: Genesis.

Munzner has been working with the genesis theme for his entire life because one day in the early 1950's, he asked himself single question: "Why?"

Munzner's art ties that abstract question into his globalist views. His final products can take up to 30 years to complete. "I don't know when they're finished; finishing is when it essentially declares its own identity," he says. The works combine art, science and mythology. "Art is the why, science is the how and the mythic is the place where the human consciousness leaves its deepest awareness," he says.

While he mostly works in acrylic and casein, a milk-based paint, Munzner doesn't limit his surfaces. Sometimes he'll do a painting on one of his drawings. He has a stack of paintings he did years ago on x-ray film.

He also draws with pencil and marker and paints with a computerized light pen. The computer he uses for his electronic paintings isn't exactly state-of-the-art. In fact, there are only three of them left in the United States, he says. He uses a Model BFA 3M Paint System, which was designed in the early 1980's and scrapped a few years later by the St. Paul-based company. Unlike today's modern computers, Munzner's machine is enormous. The disk drive, which uses the old 5-and-a-half inch floppy disks, is about two feet high. The large monitor looks like something out of an old science fiction movie.



Aribert Munzner, a local artist, whose works can be viewed during early August at Intermedia Arts

But the light pen is all Munzner needs to produce his computer-based images. "It's a dedicated system," he says. "It allows me to produce 16 million colors, it responds to my hand movements instantly. Hey, it's klunky, but it works."

Munzner, whose works can be seen at Intermedia Arts until Aug. 10 as part of the "Minneapolis 55408" show, has no plans to slow down. Despite the seeming contradiction that he's been an artist for 57 years and his career is just starting, Munzner isn't a man of contradictions—he knows exactly what he wants from his art. "I want to eventually find the ultimate question of reality," he says.