

Chazen Museum of Art

Artist Jim Dine gives major gift to the Chazen

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M.P. King — State Journal Visitors take in an exhibit of works by artist Jim Dine at the Chazen Museum of Art. The important American artist donated to the museum 68 of his works, which are on display through Aug. 17 in the exhibition “‘I knew him.’ Jim Dine Skulls, 1982-2000.”

The UW-Madison campus has a new landmark for graduation photos: Jim Dine's sculpture "Ancient Fishing," a 1,500-pound, 6-foot-high work of bronze now outside the entrance to the Chazen Museum of Art.

The work was installed May 15, just in time for flocks of 2014 graduates to pose with it in their caps and gowns. "Ancient Fishing," featuring a giant human skull shored up by what appears to be a wood pallet and charred boards (actually carefully crafted works of bronze) continues to attract a stream of curious visitors and cameras.

The work is one of 67 gifted to the Chazen by the legendary contemporary artist Dine.

The donated works — all centered on the theme of the skull — make up the Chazen exhibition titled "I knew him.' Jim Dine Skulls 1982-2000," which runs through Aug. 17.

"Jim Dine is an icon of American art," said museum director Russell Panczenko. "This is someone who's recognized worldwide. This is one of America's most important artists."

The title of the exhibition "I knew him.," comes from a famous scene in Shakespeare's "Hamlet." It was the artist's idea to donate works focusing on the skull.



M.P. King — State Journal Jim Dine's bronze sculpture "Ancient Fishing" was installed this spring outside the Chazen Museum of Art, 700 University Ave.



Dine himself came to Madison to help install the show and attend its opening. An artist talk featuring a chat between Dine and Panczenko can be seen on the Chazen Museum's website.

Dine rose to fame at the same time as Pop artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Roy Lichtenstein.

His creativity is not limited to visual art; Dine was an early performance artist and also writes. In October, he likely will return to Madison to do a poetry reading and work on a piece commissioned by the Chazen, Panczenko said.

In the museum show, Dine's self-portrait appears in several works, sometimes in a man's bathrobe, the iconic image most associated with Dine since he began using it in the 1960s. "Dine has a repertoire of select images — bathrobes, hearts, skulls — that are his images," Panczenko said.

A superb draftsman who also paints, etches, sculpts, makes prints, ceramics and photography, Dine uses the images to explore a huge range of media.

"Look at his skulls: There's a skull that's printed on paper, a skull that's printed on fabric," Panczenko said. "Yes, he likes skulls as an object, but he loves to experiment — what will his art look like in a different medium with a different approach (using) different tools?"



M.P. King — State Journal Jim Dine's "The Plow" is at the center of an exhibition of the artist's work on display at the Chazen Museum of Art through Aug. 17.



M.P. King — State Journal Tools, a signature of artist Jim Dine, protrude from a canvas that is part of the exhibition "I knew him.' Jim Dine Skulls, 1982-2000."

Dine's experimentation will make the collection at the Chazen of great interest to future scholars, Panczenko said.

"If you can get one of his themes and look at it over 20 to 30 years, rather than look at one example of his work, how much richer it is," he said. "There's a lot to explore. How does he work? What's he do with that skull and why? What are the different effects?"

Born in Cincinnati in 1935, Dine was 12 when his mother died and he went to live with his maternal grandparents, according to a gallery that carries his work. His grandfather owned a hardware store, and Dine began a long fascination with hand tools. Many actually appear in his work.

At center in the Chazen show is "The Plow," a sculpture featuring the huge wooden skull Dine carved to make the mold for "Ancient Fishing." The skull sits upon an actual field plow painted a mysterious gray.

"I was very influenced by farm machinery — and by my grandpa," Dine says in the online video. Where he places tools in a canvas or in a sculpture is not a conscious decision; the titles of his pieces also come from his subconscious, he said.



M.P. King — State Journal Artist Jim Dine uses the image of the skull in photographs, paintings, etchings, prints, ceramics, sculpture and more in the works currently on display at the Chazen Museum of Art.

Dine made his first visit to the Chazen while in Madison to do work at UW-Madison's Tandem Press, a fine-art press run by Panczenko's wife, Paula.

After a tour of the museum, "My wife and I took him to dinner," Panczenko said. "And — I can't forget the phrase he used — he said, 'Would it be all right if I offered some of my work to your museum?'"

Dine also has donated large bodies of work to museums in New York and Britain. The artist wants to preserve his legacy, and liked the way the Chazen displays art, Panczenko said.

"He said, 'I've done this with others. This is a place that I want to make sure my art is in for the future.'"

The Chazen underwent a \$43 million expansion in 2011.

Dine's gift to the Chazen is probably worth between \$4 million and \$6 million, Panczenko said. "In a sense it's the building doing what we always hoped it would do — inspire more art coming in" as a gift, the museum director said. "There is no way we could buy this collection. It just couldn't happen."



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