

Shrinky Dink Is Medium For Charity Art Auction

Nov 2, 1999

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Rain drums against Robert Yoder's windows while he watches Martha Stewart on TV. In front of her perfect Caesar salad, on his coffee table, sits a pile of colorful shards: hard and curly plastic.

The artist gestures toward the heap with an air of helplessness.

"Martha," he says, "would know just what to do!"

Yoder is wrestling with a singular artistic problem - one which, until now, has been foreign to his whole career. How, he is agonizing, does he make art out of Shrinky Dinks, that trademark plastic toy material from the '70s? Yoder needs to know; his deadline is approaching.

The painter and mixed-media artist needs his entry for Seattle's first Shrinky Dink Art Invitational, which takes place at Zeitgeist Cafe in two weeks.

The invitational is a charity art auction with one twist. The only pieces up for bid are all made from Shrinky Dinks plastic. All proceeds go to the Langston Hughes Cultural Arts Center. Laughs center director Sam Snead, "It's a pretty funny thing. But we're delighted they chose us as recipients. The funds will be used to support our theater program."

Yoder, whose work is collected by Microsoft and Boeing, is unusually excited over the Shrinky Dink Invitational. What artists really like about the project, Yoder says, is not just the miniature size and the retro medium. It's the fact this strange event treats artists with respect.

"Artists here are constantly asked to donate work for auction. Which, of course, is like asking us to donate money. But the lure for people who attend those things is, 'Hey, get a bargain!' And that devalues the artist's market value."

Yet, the Shrinky Dink auction has produced the opposite vibe. Eighty enthusiastic artists are participating. There will be pieces from the likes of Yoder, Ken Kelly, Parris Broderick, Miriam Aziza Stephan, James Jaxxa, Gary Bedell, Jim German, Carla Grahn, Lance Thornton, Enrico Gropius, Esther Mast and Nicola Vruwink.

Indeed, the Shrinky Dink event was thought up by artists - poet Sarah Polle and painter Bryan Yeck. Yeck, who is one of three co-owners of the host venue, has fond memories from his childhood: "The idea of doing art with Shrinkies came from Sarah. But my ears pricked up because I loved to use them years ago."

Older artists, some participants claim, have an unfair edge because Shrinky Dinks played a seminal part in their development. But there are younger artists who claim a clearer view - because the Shrinky Dink experience is new to them. "It's all totally hilarious," says Yoder. "I never ever did it when I was a kid. So I had no idea just how much the stuff shrinks up! My first experiment at making something just contracted!"

This artist doesn't do a lot of work in miniature; his current project is a \$50,000 commission for Paul Allen's stadium. Even as he unrolls the blueprints for this piece, however, it's clear his mind is still preoccupied with thinking Shrinky. "It's just great, because you have to approach it differently. You're doing something similar to your usual work. But the medium's wacky and it puts you on your toes."

Yoder, who makes post-modern, post-Constructivist assemblage, illustrates this point by holding up a tiny square. It looks sort of like a Robert Yoder postage-stamp. "See, if you just make a work and shrink it, it's a failure. It becomes nothing more than a little Yoder. You have to re-think your process in terms of the medium."

"One thing about this auction certainly makes it quite unusual. None of us are likely to make more art with Shrinky Dinks. People who buy these pieces really are gonna get originals!" ----- Auction details

The Shrinky Dink Art Invitational is Nov. 4 at Zeitgeist Art & Coffee, 163 S. Jackson St., Seattle; 206-583-0497. Work on display from 7 a.m.; silent auction from 8 to 8:45 p.m.
