

Is mass-produced art still art? Akron show hits on profit, pride

DAN TRANBERG

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The correlation between art and money has long been a subject of heated debate. Artists, at their end of the equation, are often exaggeratedly portrayed either as idealists who refuse to see their work within a world of commodities or the opposite — money-grubbers who will produce anything that sells.

In reality, most artists fall somewhere in the middle. But a new exhibition coming to the Emily Davis Gallery at the Myers School of Art at the University of Akron will prompt viewers to consider both ends of the spectrum. It will feature more than 140 mass-produced art objects, from ashtrays and soup cans to perfume bottles and toy figurines.

The show, "Mass Production: Artists' Multiples and the Marketplace," will run Monday, Oct. 30, through Friday, Dec. 1, and will include works dating from the mid-1930s through 2006 by such artists as Andy Warhol, Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, Roy Lichtenstein, Yoko Ono and Keith Haring.

Curator Kevin Concannon, an art history professor at the Myers School, has been developing the show for more than two years, involving students in every aspect of the exhibition's planning. He even had students design page layouts for the show's elaborately produced catalog and create written entries on individual artists.

A key aspect of the show's premise is the reality that no single definition exists for an artist's multiple. The conventional definition — a three-dimensional, limited-edition object designed by an artist — is brought into question from every angle. Some works in the show are flat, for instance, and some are produced in



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ART AND MONEY: Artist Yoshitomo Nara's "Dish (Too Young to Die)," a commercially produced ceramic ashtray, is one of more than 140 objects featured in "Mass Production: Artists' Multiples and the Marketplace," at the University of Akron's Emily Davis Gallery beginning Monday, Oct. 30.

unlimited quantities.

Another conventional notion about the artist's multiple is that it is, by definition, produced as a group of identical objects. This idea is shattered with the inclusion of French artist Niki de Saint Phalle's 1964 multiple "Schutzenbild (Shoot-It-Yourself-Picture)."

Produced in an edition of 100, each example of "Schutzenbild" is distinctive because the artist designed it as a white rectangular surface with small bags of colored paint attached. Those were intended to create a unique pattern, as the purchaser was instructed to shoot each bag with a .22-caliber rifle.

Other works in the show were chosen for the similarly provocative questions they raise. Paramount among them is the question of whether the very idea of the multiple is grounded in altruism or greed: While the mass

production of an artist's work obviously gives the artist a much larger audience, it also creates far more possibilities for profit.

If the Akron show comes off as planned, it will demonstrate that the artist's multiple can be both democratic and commercial. And on top of that, it can be good art, too.

The Emily Davis Gallery at the University of Akron's Myers School of Art is at 150 E. Exchange St. Call 330-972-8278.

Tranberg is an artist and writer living in Cleveland. Art Matters is a column that runs weekly in Friday covering the area art scene. To be considered for publication, items about shows or openings must be received three weeks in advance. Mail to Plain Dealer Art Critic, 1801 Superior Ave., Cleveland, OH 44114, or fax to 216-999-6269.

To reach Dan Tranberg: trandan@core.com