



Kansas Studies Institute enters second year

M.T. Liggett stands next to his art in Mullinville.

The Kansas Studies Institute enters its second year with two projects related to Kansas artists.

■ The first is the public premiere of *Moon Tossers of the Prairie*, a documentary about Mullinville folk artist M.T. Liggett, at 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 21, in the Hudson Auditorium on the second floor of the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art. The event is free and open to the public.

Written and produced by JCCC faculty and staff, the 30-minute film takes an in-depth look at the metal sculptor who uses scrap farm equipment as his media, a cutting torch and arc welder as his tools.

The subject of previous television interviews and newspaper articles, Liggett is often portrayed as an eccentric right-wing conservative. His roadside collection from the 1990s trashes the Kansas Board of Education, Clinton Administration and Janet Reno. Dig deeper, and one finds his art is bipartisan.

“When you look at his art, he is as hard on conservatives as he is on liberals,” said Dr. James Leiker, director, the Kansas Studies Institute at JCCC. “His art is polemic, designed to provoke a response and touch people’s political nerves.”

Leiker said the goal of this documentary is to take more than a superficial look at the 79-year-old artist.

“When you just drive by and look at the art, it’s easy to dismiss it as weird and wacky, but when you get below the surface there is something a lot deeper there,” Leiker said. “M.T. appears to be a rural eccentric, but he’s been all over the world in the military and is well read in politics, philosophy and law.”

The genesis of the documentary was two JCCC Kansas tours, which visited Liggett to view his metal signs, windmills and gyros lining Mullinville, a city between Dodge City and Pratt.

Two of the tour participants became the “movers and shakers” of the documentary. Martha Varzaly, adjunct associate professor, English, is the scriptwriter; Bob Epp, adjunct associate professor, desktop publishing, the filmmaker. The film’s advisers are Leiker; Allison Smith, associate professor, art history; and Larry Meeker, JCCC Foundation board member and Liggett friend. The documentary has been a year in the making, filming first-person interviews with Liggett at his studio and Meeker’s home in Lake Quivira. Epp also interviewed Rebecca Hoffberger, founder and director of the American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore, which has six Liggett pieces on display. Liggett and the JCCC group have become friends, Liggett creating totems of Smith, Epp and Meeker.

■ The second KSI project also involves a Kansas artist – Stan Herd, considered the world’s preeminent representational earthwork artist. Herd will deliver his address, *The Prairie Renaissance*, at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 10, in the Hudson Auditorium as part of the Kansas Lecture Series. The lecture is free and open to the public.

Herd will be looking at themes of prairie art and how painters, sculptors and now filmmakers are rethinking the concept of the prairie in their subject matter.

In addition, the college is working toward a permanent crop art piece created by Herd, installed on the west side of campus near the Horticultural Science Center. Leiker says the finished piece would be a collaboration between KSI, the Nerman Museum, campus services, and horticulture and art history programs. Students in horticulture would help implement and maintain the piece.

“We are in the beginning discussions of a Stan Herd original to be created over the next two years, contingent on funding,” Leiker said.

According to his bio, Herd has been creating art for more than 30 years – by digging, disking, plowing and otherwise manipulating acres of green space. His canvas is the great outdoors – literally, a farmer’s field, an abandoned park or even a soil-capped landfill. Born into a family who’s farmed for three generations in southwest Kansas, Herd has always had an intimate relationship with the land that’s dovetailed with his art.

Herd’s work has been featured on CBS’s *Sunday Morning*, NPR’s *All Things Considered* and *What Do You Think?*, Dateline NBC, *Late Night with David Letterman*, *Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *The New Look of Paris* and *The London Telegraph*. A book, *Crop Art and Other Earthworks*, details Herd’s artistic journey through pictures and stories.



Earthwork artist Stan Herd will speak on *The Prairie Renaissance*, at 7 p.m. Nov. 10 as part of JCCC’s Kansas Lecture Series. Herd’s *Sunflower Still Life* is seen below. ▼

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■ KSI and Community Services, which co-sponsored the six-part Kansas Studies Series in fall 2009 and spring 2010, are working with Barrett Beasley, TV producer/director, on a 30-minute companion video to be aired late fall on JCCC’s cable channel and video server. The series was taught by JCCC faculty on topics of Kansas culture, history, economics, literature and environment. Beasley has set these topics against Kansas landscapes of the Konza prairie, Flint Hills and small towns like Cottonwood Falls and Council Grove, interspersed with historic photos that relate to class topics such as those of the Great Depression. The Kansas Studies Series will not be offered in fall 2010.

■ Future projects for KSI include possible faculty exchanges with a western Kansas community college, a student internship working in conjunction with a regional museum or archive; securing funds for faculty to incorporate Kansas studies into a class unit; and a partnership with the Billington Library for a Kansas studies room to keep primary documents related to Kansas history.



In its first year, KSI initiated the Kansas Lecture Series with a standing-room-only crowd for Dr. Wes Jackson, president, The Land Institute; lectures and a performance of *Flyin’ West*, by JERIC productions, regarding Nicodemus; the co-sponsorship of the Kansas Studies Series; and purchase of Kansas-related books for the library.

“On the whole, the thing that happened best for KSI in its first year is good public programming,” Leiker said. **Im**