



## Wichita Falls Views the Works of William and Shannon Cannings

By Douglas Chapman



The “inflated” artwork of Texas Tech School of Art’s own instructor-artists, William and Shannon Cannings, is currently on display at the University Art Gallery at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls. This two-person exhibition opened January 19 and will go through February 23, 2007. The exhibition entitled “Under Pressure” explores a bit of “backyard” Americana and consumerism. The show features the works of Shannon which include drawings and paintings of plastic beach balls, swimming pools, and anything plastic that can be found in the typical all-American backyard. William’s works include sculptures of those same plastic objects, but made deceptively out of steel and aluminum metals. Both Cannings are well-heeled, experienced artists and instructors and both teach their trades at Texas Tech’s School of Art. Right now, all of their artwork is on display at the Midwestern State University exhibition. William Cannings attended Loughborough College of Art and Design in Loughborough, England between 1988 and 1989. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts-Sculpture in



1995 from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia and he received his Master of Fine Arts-Sculpture in 1998 from the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Syracuse University in New York. Arriving at Tech in 2000, he is currently an Associate Professor in Sculpture at the School of Art. Shannon Cannings was raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Painting from Temple University's Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia and spent half of her junior year at Temple in Rome, Italy. She received her Master of Fine Arts Degree in Painting from Syracuse University's College of Visual and Performing Arts. Shannon is currently an adjunct instructor in the Foundation Program at the School of Art at Texas Tech.



Both of the Cannings artistic styles and their works are unique and give the viewer a sense of Americana, like the experiences one would remember from childhood in the all-American backyard: plastic blowup toys that kids would play with in and around the pool- beach balls, tire tubes, flotation rafts and mattresses, pillows and plastic lawn furniture, etc. Anything that can be inflated with air and anything made of plastic. "Inflated objects have become a symbol of our popular culture: cheap, disposable, fun and whimsical,



sometimes frivolous and distasteful,” William, said. “I am attracted to the look, feel and smell of inflatable objects. Inflatable objects have exposed me to new kinds of experiences. I enjoy the interaction of squeezing, pushing, pulling and being absorbed. While lying on an inflated mattress, for example, one sinks into and is surrounded by air. I want to create the realistic look, feel (and even smell-through suggestion) of an inflated plastic or vinyl object using different metals in my sculptures. It’s funny, but when people first see my work they want to go up and touch it thinking they will be touching plastic, but when they feel it and it is hard and cold and then tap on it and hear a ting, ting, they just can’t believe their senses,” William smilingly said. “That’s when I know I did a good job,” he added. “I grew up in an almost Rockwellian kind of environment as a child in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania,” Shannon said. “I have fond memories of my family’s backyard and the inflatable toys I used to play with there and in the pool.



I have tried to recreate those memories as realistically as I can through my work in drawing and painting. I really don’t have to go to far to find objects to draw or paint. William and I have two infant daughters with all kinds of inflatable toys we are always tripping over!” she laughingly said. William and Shannon certainly seem to have a busy life. They are both constantly involved in their teaching careers, exhibiting their artwork, and raising their two



daughters. “I consider myself three things,” Shannon said. “I am a teacher, artist, and mother. I think being an artist is the easiest for me since that just comes naturally to me. Being a teacher is a bit harder because I am busy with the students and their pursuits, homework, tests and evaluations. But, I think the hardest job of all is being a mother. That is a difficult job and my daughters need lots of attention and nurturing,” she said. William agreed with her. “Both of our kinds of art are so different in nature, yet seem to have an awful lot in common,” William said. “We both are attracted to objects you blow up with air- I sculpt them and Shannon paints them. I guess that is what attracted us to each other at Syracuse University and we have not regretted it. We work well together,” he said. William and Shannon will have a small showing with chiCrits: Femoirs at the ArtDepot at 1717 Texas Avenue in Lubbock from Friday, May 5 to Thursday, May 18. William has a busy year ahead of him. In July, he will be included in Surface Tension at the Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington, TX. He will have a solo show in September at the Anya Tish Gallery in Houston and be included in a three-person exhibition at Pan American Art Projects, Miami in October.