Amateur criticizes art experts

By Mark James

MIT should “drive out the witch doctor” by providing an alternative to the “myth of contemporary art criticism” in its educational program, a selection review, Roger Kolb stated in a talk given last Monday.

Kolb, who heads the order section of the Committee on Visual Arts (CVA), saying that it applies the standards of a majority of art criticism to the selections of works, resulting in the slection of expensive works from artists who have received critical praise, rather than works appealing to the general community.

Kolb said that the “Transparency of Horizons” illustrates that there are three important points that must be resolved concerning MIT art policy: what MIT’s objectives are in selecting sculpture, what the attitude of the CVA is toward the process, and how money is allocated for the purchase of art.

He said that the CVA should “find out the sentiments of the students” before selecting art for MIT. When asked for his personal preference as to how the money should be spent, Kolb said that he would prefer “more gardens, more greenery.”

Kolb noted that about 15 years ago, a decision was made to expand the MIT art collection, to counter the image of MIT as “a naive provincial” with respect to art. He described this attitude with the phrase “MIT must wear its art on its sleeve.”

CVA member Guy Nordenson pointed out at the meeting that it was incorrect to think of MIT’s art collection as a monetary investment, since most of the art works such as the Henry Moore sculptures are commissioned on the condition that they would never be sold.

According to Kolb, mysticism in art began in the nineteenth century as the means of the “misunderstood artist,” which is used to justify the critical acclaim given to art that is not popular with the general public.

Kolb said that this idea coincided with a general increase in art prices, which was partly due to large amounts of art-purchasing by American millionaires to demonstrate their cultural superiority — “that they, too, can be on the side of the angels.”

It is in the best interests of art critics to perpetuate mysticism in art, according to Kolb, because this way they can encourage the idea that they are the only ones who are qualified to judge art, thereby justifying their own existence.

Kolb said that the freelance writer is the only person free to challenge the existing system. Art critics, curators, and college professors all stand to lose in reputation if they differ with the position held by the majority of their colleagues. He cited The Painted Word by Tom Wolfe and Hypocrisy About Art by Theodore L. Shaw as examples of books that challenge the present system.

Medical plan approved

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decreases were worked out as a compromise.

According to Medical Advisory Board member Richard Goldhor, G, the Institute is “seriously examining” allowing MIT students to join the comprehensive health plan organized for MIT faculty and staff. A member of this plan pays a flat yearly fee for all medical care, including checkups, visits to specialists, hospital and accident coverage.

Goldhor wrote that “purchasing such care on a prepaid basis often results in significant savings.” It is no panacea for the ill of already high and rapidly increasing medical costs.

The Board was concerned about the large increase in the student insurance plan cost because it had recommended earlier this year that MIT require students to carry hospital and accident insurance.

Goldhor stated, adding that each year a number of students require expensive care for which they are unable to pay. “In many cases, the Institute is stuck with the bill, or the student, often already in financial difficulty, is saddled with substantial new debts.”

Foreign students have been required to carry either MIT’s plan or one that is roughly equivalent for a number of years.

For next year, students who are US citizens and don’t want to be in the MIT plan must fill out a written waiver — included in the registration materials — and return it by Aug. 5.

The Department of Linguistics and Philosophy will offer a new undergraduate program next term, Language and Mind, which will span philosophy, linguistics, and cognitive psychology, according to its new head Ned Block, Assistant Professor of Philosophy.

The central focus of the program, which has been in planning for more than a year, will be the relation between logical and mental representation of knowledge. Block said MIT research has achieved prominence in this field, undergraduates have not previously been offered either a coherent program or several courses — both of which are now being introduced.

“New program introduced: ‘Language and Mind’

By Jim Eisen

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Notes

By Judy Bostock

The Board was formed four years ago on an ad-hoc basis, but is now a permanent Institute committee. It is charged with receiving and deciding on applications for the Medical Department, evaluate criticisms and suggestions.