



Art

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In Memoriam: Cal Poly art professor Michael Barton Miller

BY JESSICA PENA

There are teachers you remember just as teachers—people who go by the books and hand out grades. Then, there are teachers who inspire their students, their colleagues, and the community with their dedication and kindness. Michael Barton Miller was, without a doubt, one of the latter.

Miller, who passed away recently after a long battle with cancer, was a prominent and popular professor in Cal Poly's Department of Art & Design. For 17 years, he taught studio art to hundreds of students in addition to curating lectures from both local and visiting artists. In 2005, he was awarded both the Richard K. Simon Faculty Award for Outstanding Scholarship and Cal Poly's Distinguished Teaching Award.

"He was one of the best teachers that we've had," said Sky Bergman, photographer and fellow professor in the Art & Design Dept. "That's evident of all the support there's been since his passing. Just on his Facebook page alone, you can see how much he impacted his students. He really influenced them and pushed us to be better artists."

New Times own Marketing and Events Coordinator, Dora Mountain, remembers her time as one of Miller's students during her time at Cal Poly.

"I truly do consider myself lucky to have had the opportunity to learn from Michael and to know him," she said. "I remember seeing one of his pieces for the first time—a massive pencil drawing of mall patrons at MOCA in LA. I was blown away by his raw talent as an artist and his ability of capturing just a simple act of everyday life and finding the awe in that."

As committed to teaching as Miller was, he was just as devoted to the practice of art. His own work transcended genre, media, and space. He crafted towering pieces that were stunning in their technical skill and provocative and playful in their content. Miller's drawings, watercolors, and mixed-media installations have been shown all over the world from Bangkok to Italy to SLO's own Cuesta College Gallery.

"I love Michael," Giancarlo Fiorenza, chair of the Art & Design Dept. remarked. "He was just a wonderful presence and struck a delightful balance between being a professor and being an artist. ... I always felt that he was just a genuine human being, a loving human being who was passionate about his work and his students."

Donations in Miller's honor can be made to the Cal Poly Art & Design Department.