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Italian art show to feature PSU alumnus

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Penn State graduate Michael Fratangelo will travel to Florence, Italy, where one of his paintings will be on display at the 2005 Florence Biennale from tomorrow through Dec. 11.

This is the fifth installment of the Biennale, an event showcasing artists from all over the world.

"Almost every major metropolitan city now has a Biennale," said Lonnie Graham, assistant professor of arts and integrative arts, who added that he thinks these events are positive both for individual artists and for worldwide understanding. "[The artwork] is essentially anointed by curators and art critics around the world as having achieved a high degree of merit."

Fratangelo, Class of 2001, said this Biennale, which is sanctioned by the United Nations, will help to bridge cultural gaps across the globe through an eclectic international mixture of art.

"It is very important for people to be informed of what is going on in other cultures," Graham said.

Because of the international mixture of artists, Fratangelo was skeptical when he first received news of his induction. "I thought it was a joke," he said.

Fratangelo said a panel of judges, including directors of museums, pick the pieces that make it into the Biennale. Artwork is picked either from a pool of submissions or, as in Fratangelo's case, the artist is sought out.

"It's kind of hard to come out of Pennsylvania and be applied to the Florence Biennale," John Bowman, associate professor of visual arts said.

Judges from the Biennale found Fratangelo's art on the Internet and, to his surprise, contacted him. Fratangelo's piece *Iraq I* is the painting that will be in the Biennale. It depicts U.S. soldiers shuffling a group of Iraqi citizens to an off-canvas location. It is part of a larger series of Iraqi people in the war. "It's more of a documentation of war," Fratangelo said. "I just want to document it as an event of our time."

Fratangelo said his pictures are not politically motivated; he got the inspiration for them by looking through black-and-white photos in *The New York Times*, from which he wanted to neutrally depict the war.

"It's not propaganda," Bowman said.

He added that two people with opposite opinions on the war could probably both say the work supports their respective views.

Fratangelo's colorful works are in the style of modern expressionism. "It's not realistic, it's your internal sense of things," Fratangelo said, describing his style of painting. He added that he has a strong internal sense of color and shape.

Fratangelo started his Penn State career not as a painter, but as a health policy administration major. "I can't even imagine it," he said, recalling his sophomore year.

He was unhappy in his major and decided to take a painting class. "It all started at Penn State with one teacher, John Bowman," Fratangelo said, "He really got the ball rolling for me."

Fratangelo was a walk-on to the art program, and his first course was Bowman's painting class. "Right away, he had his own voice -- an unmistakable vision from the beginning," Bowman said.

Fratangelo recalled the early stages of his art education, sitting with 30 others painting a still life.

"Mine would be completely different," Fratangelo said.

Bowman recognized Fratangelo's knack for color, and, according to Fratangelo, it changed his life.

Fratangelo graduated with a Bachelor of Science in art education and a minor in art history, with an emphasis on painting. He now teaches art at Pleasant Hills Middle School near Pittsburgh.