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METRO EDITION

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THE 'BLONDE BOMBSHELL'

Monroe exhibition may set Art Center records



Al Harris-Fernandez, Sioux City Art Center director, stands in front of an acrylic painting depicting a scene from the film "Marilyn Monroe: Life as a Legend." An exhibit, "Marilyn Monroe: Life as a Legend," opens Saturday. (Staff photo by Jerry Mennenga)

Facility aims to raise visibility

By John Quinlan
Journal staff writer

When Elton John first sang "Candle in the Wind" in 1973, Diana, for whom many believed the song was intended, was no princess.

She was a 12-year-old school girl years away from being anyone's icon, as Elton later proclaimed in a remade version of the song. The person living her life like a candle in the wind in the original song was legendary movie star Marilyn Monroe, an icon without peer whose face and

form are as familiar now as they were at the time of her premature death 45 years ago at the age of 36.

The film legend comes to the Sioux City Art Center on Saturday as the subject of its latest exhibit, "Marilyn Monroe: Life as a Legend." The traveling exhibition showing through Nov. 25 features more than 270 images of Monroe, both artwork and photos, many of them candid images rarely seen by the public.

Why Marilyn?

SEE MARILYN
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If you're going

WHAT: "Marilyn Monroe: Life as a Legend"

WHEN: Saturday to Nov. 25

WHERE: Sioux City Art Center, 225 Nebraska St.

ADMISSION: \$5 for adults, \$3 for children 12-18 and students with IDs, free for children 11 and under and Art Center Association members. Free admission nights are Thursdays from 5 to 9 p.m.

MORE: Contact the Sioux City Art Center at 712-279-6272 ext. 200 or www.siouxcityartcenter.org

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE: Marilyn Monroe's biography.

Marilyn

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"Because this whole series was about raising the visibility of the Art Center, attracting a broader audience," said Art Center director Al Harris-Fernandez. "So Marilyn is part of the Blockbuster Exhibition Series. Each one – a lot of them deal with popular culture – give us the ability to attract new audiences that might not come to the art center except for a show like this."

"Rodin: A Magnificent Obsession" in June 2003 was the first in the series. The "blonde bombshell" is the fifth Blockbuster.

And the stage is set. The atrium walls have been transformed with a flamboyant wash of hot pink, accentuated with wisps of sparkling white

tulle. The Monroe art is taking up the two top-floor galleries, and some of the atrium, about 5,000 square feet or 75 percent of the building's exhibition space.

Though the Art Center was unable to secure any of Monroes' films for display, there will be a 22-minute documentary about her career that will play on the atrium wall TV near the art center entrance to acquaint the public with Monroe's career, Harris-Fernandez said.

"People are excited because Marilyn Monroe is one of those celebrities that doesn't go away," he said. "You go into a lot of restaurants and you'll see posters of her. It's the same thing with James Dean, a few other people, that kind of continue that star power. And especially with her dying young and the controversies around her life and the president and all those

things, have kind of kept her in the public's eye."

Jan Poulson, Art Center Association board president, said she won't be surprised if this exhibit breaks the art center's attendance records.

The exhibition combines the most well-known images of the film star by a wide variety of photographers and artwork of her by national and international artists, including American artists Andy Warhol, Robert Indiana, Mel Ramos, Tom Wesselmann and Richard Lindner. Among the photographers represented are Sam Shaw, Richard Avedon, Milton Green and Henri Cartier-Bresson. Also included are photos taken by amateurs such as Marilyn's onetime husband, playwright Arthur Miller.

"A lot of the photographs in the show are photographs that most people have never seen before. They're not the ones that have been published over

and over again," Harris-Fernandez said. "There's a lot of unique images, candid images of Marilyn."

So while most of the images reinforce Marilyn's self-proclaimed image as an "artificial product," the Marilyn that was once Norma Jean Baker, other shots offer a glimpse of Monroe as a regular human being, shy or canny, depending on her mood.

Then there are the iconic photos, such as the one that Andy Warhol made famous in his artistic rendition, all of which are also on display. Visitors can even see photographs of Warhol made up as Monroe.

"The show's almost as much about the artists who have depicted her, like Warhol who did a series of paintings about her," Harris-Fernandez said. "He was a pop artist and the reason he was using her is because she was kind of an icon

for the idea of popular culture and celebrities that are icons in our culture."

With an increase in TV advertising in Warhol's time, he saw the recirculation of images become like another commodity. He looked at Monroe as another kind of commodity image, "and so he was recycling her through his art, in a sense," the director said.

As a complement to the traveling exhibition, art center painting students will have on display in the second floor gallery their impressionistic interpretations of the actress. The art center's Gardner Cafe will offer special Monroe-inspired selections on the menu.

The exhibition was organized by Artoma in Hamburg, Germany, and circulated by International Arts & Artists in Washington, D.C. After Sioux City, it will move to Nova Scotia