

'Iraqopoly' and war prints on Caledonia

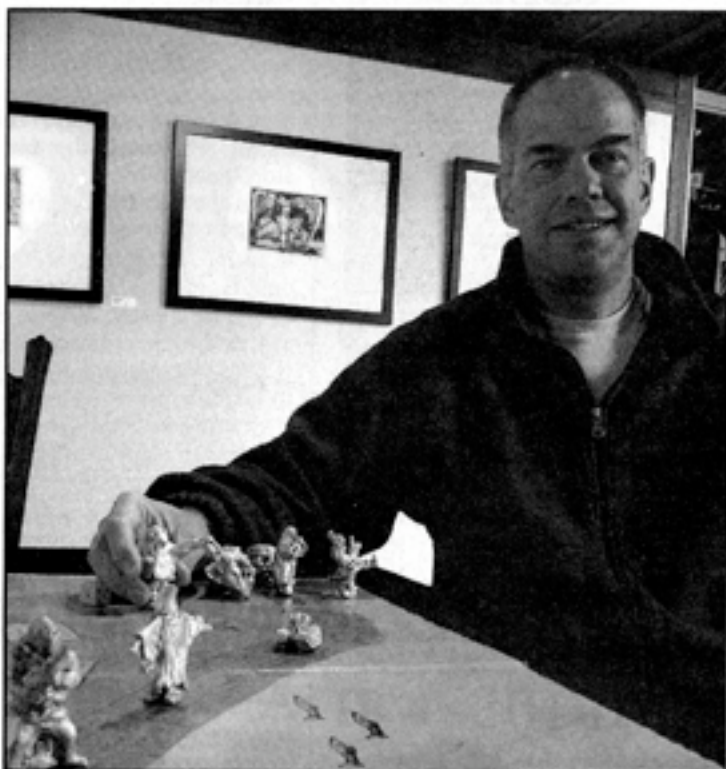
JONAH OWEN LAMB
SPECIAL TO THE SCOPE

"Play Iraqopoly! Rules: There are no rules, only ideology. Get to Baghdad, then roll for an exit strategy."

These are the instructions printed on the top of artist Art Hazelwood's board game, part of his current show at the John Wilmer Studio on Caledonia Street. The players move around the board on a map of Iraq with carved figures such as George Bush, Saddam Hussein or a prisoner from Abu Ghraib. Alongside this board game, the show, entitled "Iraqopoly and War Prints," is made up of a series of pieces that vary from woodcuts to lithographs to linocuts.

The evocative, dark and almost painful pieces touch on some inner rage bordering on self-loathing that paints an artist's view of this country's current situation. Central characters hold sway over each image, drawing the eye to their ferocity, which drives home each piece's immediacy. Each figure is framed and shaped by strong, almost fierce, lines that look like they were carved in anger. Almost every character appears to be pleading to you or straining under some unspoken pain.

"Art should be a prod; it should be stimulating," said Hazelwood. "Contemporary art should connect us to the moment we live in. If it doesn't, it seems so divorced from the



Art Hazelwood's art show "Iraqopoly and War Prints" is currently on display at John Wilmer's studio, located at 333B Caledonia Street.

photo by Jonah Owen Lamb

time we are living."

Hazelwood, originally from Massachusetts, began his career when he received a B.A. in art from UC Santa Cruz. Many of his views about the world were shaped after school when he traveled and lived abroad in the late '80s and early '90s. Some of his earlier art documents these travels, depicting scenes and people from around the world.

Woodcutting has been his

primary medium from as far back as his university days but he has also done etching, linocuts and lithographs as well as oil and watercolor painting.

One of the most powerful pieces in the show is called "Voila the Enemy." It depicts the U.S. Capitol, topped by the hooded figure from Abu Ghraib, with a gaggle of people toward the bottom of the piece. The words "Voila the enemy" are inscribed along the bottom of the image.

Another image that speaks volumes is a large monoprint with three images: oil pipelines, smoking oil wells and M16s upended, topped by helmets.

"I view the world through culture. There's a strong connection, between artists, of basic human values," he said, adding that many of his influences come from other artists and writers. One series of large four-color woodblock prints in

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the show was directly influenced by literature.

"Requiem for Dionysus" is inspired by a Euripides play, using it as a launching point for a treatment of the current U.S. war on terrorism," Hazelwood said. "In the play, the king of Thebes suspects a foreigner is inciting the people to madness and in his zeal for control he vows to uproot the evildoers. Like the current regime in the U.S., the king believes the enemy understands only force. The king's own hubris leads in the end to his destruction and that of his empire."

In its current state, Hazelwood's work is palpably political and outraged. He likes literature that makes a direct correlation between the past and the present. In this way he can be a link to the past and perhaps locate his place in the present as an artist.

Although his art has always had some elements of social commentary, Hazelwood said that when he started doing work for Street Sheet, a paper by and about the homeless in San Francisco, he really gained a voice that became more political.

"I've been doing social commentary stuff for a long time, probably since the late '80s, just daily life scenes; they're not pointed," he said. "When I moved to San

Francisco, I started working for Street Sheet and that gave me a voice and broadened my ability to focus on political issues."

Much of the art in the show speaks to a tradition of politically and socially involved art such as social realism and especially to art from the Weimar period in Germany. Much of the art from the '20s and '30s that influenced Hazelwood's work was overtly political; some might even call it propaganda.

"The idea of propaganda shifts," said Hazelwood. "Art has to have something to say. If it doesn't, it's just vacuous. I think maybe propaganda is an element of art. If art doesn't have any emotional impact or expression, it's just design. If it has no propaganda at all it's just wallpaper."