

Citywide photo festival is clicking into place

By Kevin Lynch and Jacob Stockinger

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A citywide photography festival is being planned for Madison next spring, with concurrent exhibitions to be held during March and April at numerous museums, galleries and cafes.

"It seems that Madison is the right size and type of city for this," said Daniel Swadener, the festival's organizer.

"I've been to photography festivals in Greece and Bratislava in Slovakia, and a big one in Houston, and I think that Madison would go for something like this," said Swadener, who is based in Akron, Ohio, and who organizes art exhibits for the Promega Corp. in Madison and curates art shows in the United States and Europe.

"Other than Art Fair on the Square, I don't know of many other art festivals going on," he said. "I've been touting it and finding a lot of interest."

Swadener envisions at least two weekends of openings at each venue and exhibitions running before and after that.

"That way, you have more of a festival atmosphere," he said. "And if we do it annually, people will get accustomed to it."

The dates for openings of the inaugural festival are tentatively set for March 3 to March 12, Swadener said.

So far, the spring photography festival — to be billed as the Madison Photo Fest — will include:

■ A group photo show by the Center for Photography at Madison in the Madison Civic Center in March.

■ A solo photography exhibit by Madison artist Susan H. Kaye at DeRici Galleries at Edgewood College from Feb. 25 through March 24. The exhibit is titled "Windows and Mirrors: Women and Their Nakedness" and is designed to "illuminate relationships with risk and exposure."

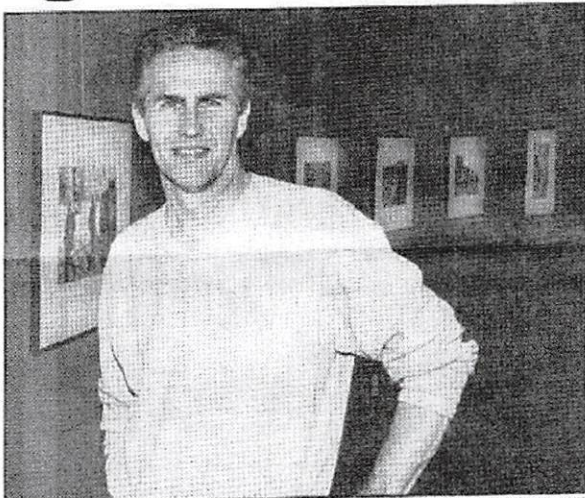
■ A show — as yet undetermined — at the spacious Promega Gallery.

■ Shows at smaller venues including King's Foot Gallery, Sunprint Gallery, Bon Appetit restaurant and Fyfe's Corner Bistro. Other galleries and cafes are being solicited for the festival.

Ralph Russo, director of the Wisconsin Union Galleries, said the Union Galleries will consider joining the festival with a spring photo exhibit when the student art committee reconvenes in the fall. One possibility is a show about African Massi women that Swadener has shown elsewhere in the United States and abroad.

Nicollette Bromberg, curator of photography at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, also said the society would probably be interested in participating in the festival.

The Madison Art Center will participate by mounting an already scheduled show to highlight its permanent collection — which contains more than 1,000 photo-



Art curator Daniel Swadener — seen here in the Promega Gallery — is organizing an annual citywide photography festival, to be launched next March and April at various museums, galleries and cafes.

graphs by artists of top regional, national and international importance.

"I think the idea of a photography festival is terrific and a lot of fun," said center Director Stephen Fleischman. "There's a pretty strong audience for photography in the community along with a good number of practitioners and collectors."

In the future, the Madison Arts Center will double its exhibition space in a new \$100 million downtown arts complex.

"So it's certainly conceivable that the new space will give us the flexibility to mount smaller photography shows specifically tied to the festival," Fleischman added.

The Elvehjem Museum of Art is already booked with exhibits for this spring, but will probably participate in future festivals, Director Russell Panczenko said.

"It's a great idea because there are two things that interest Madison — prints and photography," Panczenko said. "Every time we do anything with photography, we get a big response. Plus, there are so many directions you can go in photography. So yes, we'd be interested in collaborating and I'm sure we can work something out."

Though still in the early planning stages, a citywide photography festival also drew praise from other local arts leaders.

"I like the idea of shows in multiple venues tied by the same media because it really builds a broader arts community in Madison," said Melanie Herzog, an Edgewood College professor of art history and director of DeRici Galleries. "With something like this, people can get a sense of the range of photography."

George Tzougros, director of the Wisconsin Arts Board — which might eventually help fund the fes-

tival — expressed support for Swadener's project.

"I think he has a good artistic eye, and I appreciate his approach to being a curator," Tzougros said. "He brings artists together, and if things go well, they get the credit. If things don't go well, he takes the heat."

"I also think the power of the types of photographs that he has been working with really helps you understand how they can get a community talking about the issues," he added.

Swadener noted that photography exhibitions are growing in popularity nationwide and around the world.

"Madison also seems to have a widespread and growing interest in photography," he said. "We want to have art photography, photojournalism, historical, landscapes — all kinds of things."

Swadener said the formation of a planning committee is the next step in bringing the idea to fulfillment.

"Everybody I talk to has ideas," he said.

Swadener said he hopes to eventually include local, regional, national and international photography, and to get the UW-Madison involved.

The festival will coincide with renowned photography authority John Szarkowski — a former curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City — teaching a class on photography in the spring semester through the UW-Madison art history department.