

Burns: Water is an 'equalizer' for artist

Continued from page 5

expressing himself through colors, he started swimming as physical therapy when he was 3 to strengthen his body.

He began his competitive swimming career in 1977 by joining De Anza College's sports program for those with disabilities. Since then, he has competed in three Paralympics and set five world records.

"Water is my anchor," Burns says. "It is an equalizer. I could build my body and self-confidence."

The competitive and spiritual dimensions of water are conveyed in four of his paintings that are exhibited at De Anza College's Euphrat Museum of Art along with the works of eight other artists. Three of Burns' large, semi-abstract paintings show swimmers stretching their bodies, resembling angels in a mass of blurry blue. In a painting of an awards presentation, the first-place winner is missing one leg.

"The theme of the exhibition is 'Picking up the Pieces,'" says Jan Rindfleisch, director of the museum. "It can mean literally piecing material together. It can also mean how all of us have to pick up the pieces of our lives and make the best of what happened. Gregory's works show how we can think differently and make our lives an artwork."

Burns says painting has been his major way of sharing his feelings with the world since he quit his job as a communications specialist for Pepsi and

Star TV to focus on painting. His recent works have gradually become more abstract, a transition from his earlier, realistic style.

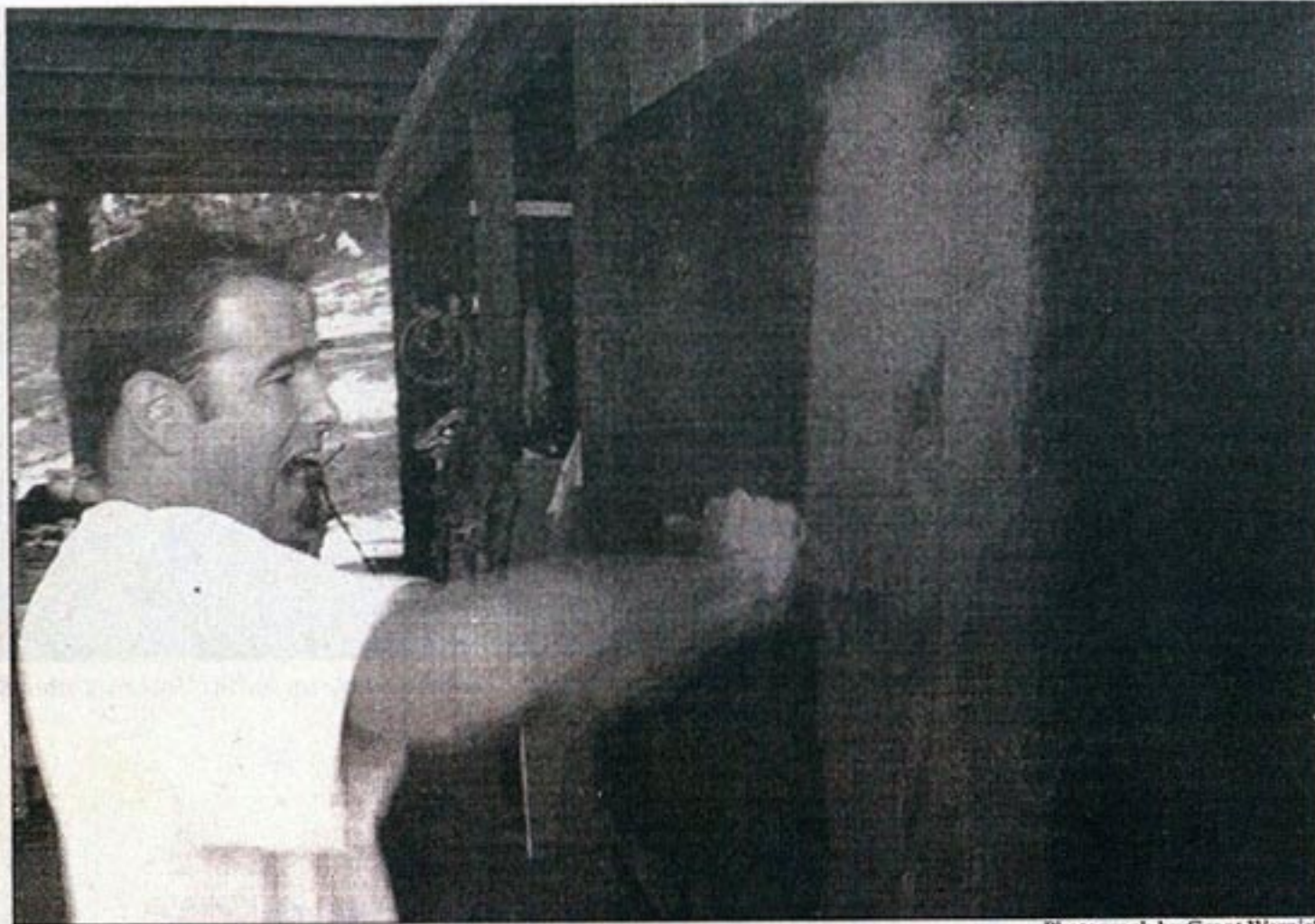
"I want to get closer to something pure, something universal, that can go straight to people's hearts," he says.

Burns says his paintings blend Western and Eastern styles of art. His use of color is influenced by Claude Monet, Richard Diebenkorn and Mark Rothko. His bold brushstrokes are learned from Vincent van Gogh and Da-chien Chang. The simple structure of Ni Tsan's paintings have also inspired him.

Burns has absorbed Chinese art since he moved to Asia in 1984 to "escape the rampant consumerism of American society." He studied Chinese brush painting, calligraphy and seal carving in Taiwan. He also traveled extensively in Asia with his partner of seven years, Angie Tan, visiting ancient temples, Zen gardens and pagodas in a search of spiritual rejuvenation. His series of paintings called "Sacred Sites" was produced during this time.

"The beauty and sanctity of those man-made structures give people pause to experience the more subtle, spiritual aspects of their being," Burns says. "That's what I want to convey in my painting."

For more information about the exhibition "Picking up the Pieces," call 408.864.8836 or visit www.deanza.fhda.edu/euphrat/. For more information about Gregory Burns, visit www.gregoryburns.com.



Photograph by Grant Wernick

Greg Burns works hard in his studio. Burns, who has polio, considers painting, along with swimming, to be a 'great healer.'

Local artist finds healing in art

For artist Greg Burns, painting can often be a physical as well as a spiritual process

By I-CHUN CHE

Holding his forearm crutch with his left hand, Gregory Burns stares at his half-finished painting, *Transition*, on the wall of his outdoor studio in Woodside. He takes a deep breath and covers the green-yellow canvas with bold strokes of

red. He uses his brushes so forcefully that the canvas' frame bangs on the wall. Then he takes the painting down and puts it on the grass. Stretching his crutch to the other side of the painting, he bends over and splashes orange acrylic paint over the canvas.

"Painting is both physical and spiritual to me," says the 45-year-old artist. Today he is wearing green shorts and a T-shirt that he got when he trained to represent America's swimming team in the 1996 Paralympics, the Olympics for people with disabilities.

Burns contracted polio when he was a year old and was paralyzed from waist down. Ever

since, he has had to use leg braces and forearm crutches.

But as his 76-year-old father, Robert, says, hardship is a word Burns doesn't accept.

He finds his ultimate freedom in painting and swimming, which he has been doing for as long as he can remember.

"Painting and swimming are great healers, counselors and friends," says Burns. "They kept me from jumping off the cliff during my early 20s, when I was experiencing a lot of emotional trauma."

While he takes pleasure in

☛ Burns, page 10

THEATER/ARTS

Picking Up the Pieces This exhibition includes references to rebuilding the body (because of age or trauma) and responses to Sept 11 one year later. The artists are Magi Amma, Gregory Burns, Serene Flax, Leonard Gerstein, Ben Kashkooli, Keba Konte, Chere Lai Mah, Donna Keiko Ozawa and Remi Rubel. Thru Wed, Nov 27. Reception with artist presentations on Tue, Oct 29, 6-8pm. Euphrat Museum of Art, De Anza College, Cupertino. For more information, call 408.864.8836.