
Los Angeles Times E

CALENDAR

Sunday, July 8, 2001

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LETTERS

Disney and Chouinard

I WAS gratified to read Suzanne Muchnic's story about Chouinard Art Institute ("True to a Significant School," July 1). The impact this school had on the art world in this country cannot be overestimated.

My father, Watson Cross, graduated from Chouinard, and for 29 years was one of the life drawing and anatomy instructors. Many of the painters, sculptors, fashion designers and animators who passed through Chouinard were in his classroom near the start of their careers. He was proud of them all and proud of the "creative training ground" that was Chouinard.

Most of the teachers and students were at first exhilarated at Walt Disney's interest and patronage of Chouinard. Unfortunately, as Disney became the school's benefactor, he also became its destroyer. His idea of a university of the arts was a good one--the fact that CalArts has survived attests to that. Clearly, Chouinard and most of its faculty did not fit his tidy, Disneyland Main Street, U.S.A. vision of a factory far removed from the gritty city, churning out talent to feed his empire. The New York academics Disney brought in to head CalArts discarded a dedicated, proven faculty and killed the spirit that was Chouinard.

We will never know what the future might have held for Chouinard if Disney had infused it with money but allowed it to remain its free-spirited, experimental self. Its demise in 1972 left a void in Los Angeles' art education as yet unfilled.

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