



Ray Katz, who heads the industrial design department at the Auburn Hills campus of Oakland Community College, displays students' works.

DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

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At OCC, industrial design looks like props for space age movie

By Carol Azizian
staff writer

What do human tanks inside a "Titan Ship" look like?

Well, the entrance to the human tank chamber is like a "red, glowing tube. The walls of the tube, the ceiling and the floor of the chamber glow a deep red from the cutout sections. Behind the rippling membrane front of each tank, adults and children float, gently rocking in the fluids of the tanks."

That's the written account — described by science fiction author Robert Heinlein in his book "The Puppet Masters."

But if you want to see what the chamber — complete with floating adults and children — looks like, you'll have to go to the Auburn Hills campus of Oakland Community College.

That's where drawings of the space ship are housed.

THEY'RE NOT drawings of an actual space ship, of course — just imaginative renditions of the "Titan Ship" created by students in the advanced industrial product drawing classes.

The exhibit also includes pictures of laser guns, futuristic communications devices and space-age cityscapes.

Industrial design instructor Norman Kleiner assigned the project to encourage students to use their imaginations. The task was intended to prepare them for the future job market, he said.

"I told them to design the spaceship as if they were going to design props for a movie," Kleiner said.

"Industrial designers are sometimes asked to make props for films like 'Blade Runner' and 'Star Wars.'"

"And many large firms — including Burroughs, General Motors and Ford — have design studios for future products. They hire designers to work on long-range ideas."

THE CREATIVE side of industrial design is combined with the technical side. The result is what educators call a comprehensive community college program in the field.

"We emphasize both the technical and aesthetic aspects," said Ray Katz, who heads the industrial design department.

He organized the program a couple of years ago after surveying more than 150

area industries on their employment needs and skills requirements.

"As a sculptor, I've always been aware of industrial design and its applications in the Detroit area," said Katz, who also heads the campus' fine arts department.

KATZ'S SURVEY confirmed his belief that, despite the troubled economy, there were still job openings in design-related fields.

"The car companies aren't hiring as many designers as modelers," he said. "But one designer usually can keep 100 modelers working easily."

Modelers make three-dimensional prototypes from designer's drawings, Katz explained.

"Women will have better opportunities for finding employment in the field because it has generally been saturated by men."

The community college's program has 17 classes, including product modeling and design, drawing, industrial sculpture, technical communications, design graphics and manufacturing.

In addition, the college is installing a computer system which will be used in designing, detailing, manufacturing and assembling products, Katz said.

Currently, 60 students, ranging in age from 18 to 35, are enrolled in the program, but it can accommodate up to 200.

Mester attends judges' college

Oakland County Circuit Judge Fred M. Mester has been awarded a scholarship to the National Judicial College's spring general jurisdiction session.

The college, whose alumni include most of Oakland's circuit judges, is located at the University of Nevada. The program runs through Friday, May 13.

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