

Worldviews

The Dolphin Gallery says goodbye to one of Kansas City's most confounding characters.



Vince Roark

Kansas City has lost one of its most renowned eccentrics.

Vince Roark, a denizen of Westport and the Kansas City Art Institute over the past 30 years, died on September 28, 2005. Disheveled, seemingly homeless, with a bungee cord for a belt and drawing tools in every pocket, Roark frequently shuffled with determination along Westport Road to his habitual destination, The Corner Restaurant. He was also a fixture on the Art Institute's campus, having adopted a table there years ago to execute his "hypergraphs." The Art Institute's administration later sought to remove him from campus, claiming that he was a liability. Some of the faculty protested with a petition to, they wrote, "keep this inspiring man in our midst." They won, and Roark stayed.

In memory of Roark, Dolphin Gallery owner John O'Brien has hastily arranged a group show with a circular motif, culling ten 36-inch-by-36-inch hypergraphics from his own collection of 180 Roark pieces. The show also includes work by David Stephenson, Archie Scott Gobber, Anna Helper, Dan Younger and Richard Loftis.

Roark's work is as confounding as he was. The drawings, made of thousands of multicolored lines, appear to be the product of machine as much as of man, exhibiting a strange intersection of math and art, aesthetics and science. Initially, the eye focuses on the centers of the spheres; inevitably, though, one's gaze moves outward, and a wider perspective reveals many-pointed constellations — and the recognizable becomes the incomprehensible. Roark was said to have seen these figures in three, four or more dimensions.

In many ways, Roark's life story seems mythical. He was an orphan who did not know the day of his birth; he could perform complex computations in his head but had difficulty with basic math; for a time, he was a laborer at Creative Candles (courtesy of another friend, owner Duane Benton) who reported having out-of-body experiences while sweeping the floor. He traded his drawings for food, for shelter, for more measuring tools.

The drawings offer a glimpse of how Roark must have gone through life, the lines spread out in a complex weave suggesting friends, acquaintances and strangers, the design both complicated and clear, intricate and simple.

Considering how much more work is presumably hanging in the homes of those who helped him, Roark deserves a bigger exhibition — nothing less for one who saw so much more.