

Meert paintings on colorful display

By Susan Mayer

The Koehnline Museum of Art is now showcasing a collection of paintings and other works by Joseph Meert, an exhibit that is "an attempt to pay homage and project new light on the achievements of an artist who passed away 20 years ago," said museum curator Nathan Harpaz.

Meert was born in Brussels, Belgium in 1905. His family immigrated to the United States when he was five, living on a farm in Kansas. The influence of the farmlands where he spent his childhood and much of his adult life can be seen in many of the paintings on exhibit.

The retrospective is hung so the viewer can follow Meert's career chronologically. Beginning with his earliest works, one can see the realistic landscapes from the 1930s reflecting the bleak nature of the depression. During the 1940s, he was influenced by cubism, which can be seen in the works entitled *Green Light* and *Stringed Instrument*.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Meert became close friends with Jackson Pollock. It was during this time that Meert experimented with modern trends. In the early '50s, Meert's techniques showed the influence of abstract expressionism. Some of the works from this time included the splashing and dripping of paint seen in Jackson Pollock's creations.

Art student Jude Kitts is especially fond of one of these paintings. The work from 1951, *Untitled*, draws her attention because of his use of line and the mixture of different media. "I like it because I actually like to paint like this. I like the way sometimes mediums that you don't normally put together react with each other and you get surprising results," she said.

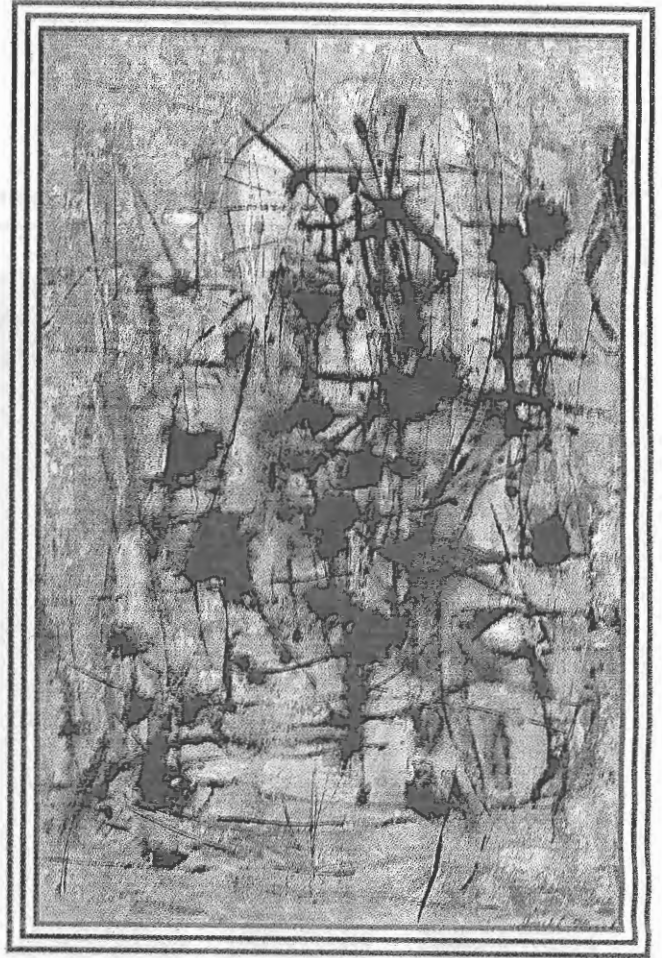
By taking time to examine the works in the gallery, you begin to realize many things about each painting that were not apparent upon first glance. One example, pointed out by Harpaz's assistant Piotr Chmielewski, is the painting entitled *Chess Players*, c. 1960s. "The men are all so sad looking, and their faces don't have much detail. The chess pieces are so detailed; more than the men," Chmielewski.

Donated to Oakton by Patrick Albano of Aaron Galleries and Joel Dryer, Meert's works will be part of the museum's permanent collection.

Chmielewski believes that Meert will become very famous as more people view his work. The exhibit will remain up until Aug. 27, 2009. Pick up the booklet just inside the gallery doors. It has wonderful information about Joseph Meert and his career, along with beautiful color plates.

The gallery is open Monday through Thursdays through August from 10 - 7.

Photos by Nick Kittner



"Untitled" created by Joseph Meert in 1951.



Meert's many works leave room for interpretation and have made their way into Oakton's permanent collection.