

What will come of 'outsider' art?

CHRIS RICKERT | 608-252-6198 | crickert@madison.com | Posted: Monday, June 28, 2010 5:00 am

With its overgrown lawn and deteriorating roof, the white, wood-sided house in the shadow of Madison Kipp Corp. on Madison's East Side looks like any other dilapidated property ripe for a visit from city building inspectors.

But peek around the front porch to the backyard and you realize this is not your typical eyesore. A larger-than-life statue of a nude woman giving birth, legs akimbo, appears, as do a number of other nudes, a pair of what appear to be pagoda-like sheds and a giant head.

The house itself, according to the few who have been inside, is full of drawings, paintings and sculpture of unknown value.

Amateur artist Sid Boyum's home at 237 Waubesa St. has been largely un-lived in since Boyum died 1991 and his son Steve took ownership.

Now Steve has died and the future of the property — which local art experts say is a valuable example of "outsider" art — is uncertain.

"It would be just the worst shame if we lost this in Madison," said Teri Marche, an associate professor of art education at UW-Madison who teaches a class that includes a visit to Boyum's home. "We lose this art and it's part of our culture. It's part of our place. And it's definitely part of a quirkiness that is Wisconsin."

New owners' plans unknown

Unfortunately for people such as Marche, those who now control of the property aren't saying much.

Steve Boyum's 1978 will, filed Feb. 5 in Rock County, appears to give the home to his son, Sebastian.

Repeated attempts to ask him and his mother, Eileen Eichman, about plans for the artwork and home were largely unsuccessful.

In a pair of e-mails this month, Eichman said Sebastian plans to live in the home and that Steve's family was not interested in being interviewed for this story.

Museum proposal languished

Whatever the family's plans now, it's clear that Steve Boyum was interested in preserving his father's artistic legacy when he was alive.

Steve Boyum first approached city officials about 2½ years ago with plans to turn the home into a museum, according to city arts administrator Karin Wolf.

"Sid Boyum's creativity and unique artistic talents could be shared with the city of Madison and surrounding communities and to people throughout the state of Wisconsin," he wrote in a one-page proposal last September.

Steve Boyum suggested Edgewood College, UW-Madison, the Goodman Community Center or the Kohler Foundation, a Kohler-based supporter of Wisconsin arts, could take over the effort. Edgewood turned down the opportunity, according to Bob Tarrell, an art professor there, and Marche said UW-Madison was never formally approached.

Becky Steinhoff, executive director of Goodman, which is only about a block away from the Boyum house, said she was willing to continue discussing it. Wolf said the Kohler Foundation told her she needed to find a nonprofit group that would be responsible for the property and then submit a proposal for funding.

"We were pretty far from that step, though," she said.

An offbeat character

If Sid Boyum's house and artwork is allowed to continue to deteriorate — or, worse, is destroyed — Madison is at least assured of holding onto 13 pieces Steve donated to the city in 1999 and had installed around the Schenk-Atwood neighborhood, as well as a handful of others that have been donated separately and placed at public sites around Madison.

The concrete pieces are in keeping with what neighbors and others who knew him describe as Sid's unconventional nature.

Known as the "mayor of Atwood Avenue," Sid Boyum lived in the Waubesa house for almost all of his 76 years. He worked as an industrial photographer, but art was his passion, and, like a lot of artists, he reportedly had his quirks — for good and for ill.

Joan Oosterwyk lived across the street from Boyum for 24 years and described a man who would give neighborhood children coins to go to the corner store and would make his own Christmas cards, many of which she still has.

"Some are offbeat," she said. "Some are insulting."

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Kate Thompson, who has lived next door to Boyum's property since 1985, acknowledged Sid "was a talented artist" but also "an annoying, crazy, old coot" who had the audacity to complain about the dog droppings in her yard when he came over to borrow — without her permission — her garden tools.

Home's contents a mystery

The work Sid did outside his house is enough to whet the appetites of local art aficionados, but the mystery is what lies inside the home, which few people have seen.

Lou Host-Jablonski, of the architectural and planning firm Design Coalition, said he saw the inside in 1999 or 2000 and that its first floor was packed with paintings, drawings and sculpture by Sid and others.

There's also some question about whether the house itself could be saved considering its long neglect and Sid's penchant for taking in dozens of stray cats.

Host-Jablonski said it would "take an enormous amount of work" to refurbish it, including a new roof, and possibly new heating and plumbing systems. And that doesn't include work to catalog the art that literally fills the home's first floor, he said.



Sid Boyum

Sid Boyum in 1988, three years before he died. Rich Rygh/The Capital Times



Sid Boyum's home on Waubesa Street on Madison's East Side. The home, which has not been lived in for years, would likely need extensive repairs if it were to be converted into a museum. Steve Apps/Wisconsin State Journal

Milwaukee St.

**Former home
of Sid Boyum**

237 Waubesa St.

Fair Oaks Ave.

**Olbrich
Botanical
Gardens**

Atwood Ave.

Lake Monona

State Journal



Sid Boyum art

Sid Boyum's sculpture "Faces" is one of 13 that his son, Steve, donated to the city in 1999 and were installed around Madison's Schenk-Atwood neighborhood. "Faces" appears in a city-owned parcel between Eastwood Drive and Atwood Avenue. Steve Apps/Wisconsin State Journal



Sid Boyum art

Sid Boyum's hippo sculpture in Wirth Court Park on Madison's East Side. Steve Apps/Wisconsin State Journal



Sid Boyum house

Overgrown plants obscure art in the backyard of late artist Sid Boyum's Waubesa Street home. Steve Apps/Wisconsin State Journal



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Sid Boyum art

A polar bear sculpture by Sid Boyum sits in Elmside Park on Elmside Boulevard on Madison's East Side.
Steve Apps/Wisconsin State Journal



Sid Boyum house

Sid Boyum's overgrown backyard still contains a number of concrete sculptures considered by local art experts to be worth saving. The future of the sculptures and of Boyum's East Side Madison home and its contents — reportedly full of paintings, drawings and more sculpture — is unclear now that Sid's son Steve has died. Steve Boyum had hoped to turn the property into an "outsider" art museum. Steve Apps/Wisconsin State Journal