

# Artist brings infusion of Chinese culture to IAC

By Jennifer Dawson  
Times Sentinel  
managing editor

Zionsville artist Becky Fehsenfeld believes in serendipity. It is fate, she said, that she will be exhibiting Chinese-inspired paintings, along with works from Chinese artists, at the Indianapolis Arts Center. Fehsenfeld, who sits on the board at the IAC, approached the center with her idea for the exhibit. She just took in September a second trip to China to lecture at Shandong University in the Shandong Province, and to help facilitate a meeting between IAC staff and professors at the University.

More than 20 years ago Fehsenfeld was a young woman just out of college when she took a job as a purser on a tourist ship with an all-Chinese, all-male crew. The ship traveled to the Panama Canal, Florida, California and Mexico. But it was the crew that was most eye-opening for Fehsenfeld, and a passion for the Chinese culture was ignited. This, Fehsenfeld said, is when an emotional connection with China was forged.

Fast-forward to Zionsville in

the year 2004. A Chinese business woman, Fan Yun, wandered into Fehsenfeld's gallery on Main Street. She was intrigued by Fehsenfeld's painting technique—using different brush strokes for each painting—and asked her why she painted that way. Fehsenfeld explained that she chose a brush stroke depending on how she “felt” about the painting. This, she said, “struck a cord” with Fan who grew up during the Chinese revolution when any form of expression was stifled.

En route back to China, Fan was flipping through a magazine when she saw an article on a childhood friend, Shen Guangwei, who had gone missing during the revolution. He was now a famous artist and a professor at Shandong College of Art and Design at Shandong University. She tracked him down and shared Fehsenfeld's work with him. She suggested that Fehsenfeld lecture at the University, and he agreed.

Fehsenfeld visited China for the first time in October 2005 to lecture at the University. She said it was surreal to finally be able to enter a country that she had felt so connected to so long ago. Fehsenfeld, having trav-

eled to between 60 and 70 countries, finds the Chinese culture fascinating. She is intrigued by the importance of hierarchy or “pecking order” within society. From arranging seating at the dinner table to introductions, everything is in order of importance, she said. She is also moved by the discipline and work ethic of the Chinese. She said because China is such a densely populated country, there is more competition for every job, even artists.

Since her 2005 trip, Fehsenfeld has returned to China several times with her husband, traveling for business. But it wasn't until last month that she returned to lecture at the University and she brought along her “posse” from the IAC to meet the Shandong professors and department heads whose paintings will be showcased in the exhibit from June 27 to August 24, 2008.

David Kwasigroh, IAC director of exhibitions and artist services, said he chose the 60-some paintings that will be exhibited from digital images, and was then able to view the work in person when he went to China with Fehsenfeld and



Photos submitted

Becky Fehsenfeld presents images of her paintings to various professors from the Shandong College of Art and Design in Jinan, China, in September.

her Gallery Director Lolly Schoonover, Joyce Summers, IAC president and executive director, and David Thomas, vice president and director of programs. Kwasigroh said the theme of the exhibit is the Chinese landscape, and will include painting, printmaking and calligraphy. Also, some of the Chinese artists will come to the IAC for a black-tie

reception for the exhibit opening. He said the quality of work from the Chinese artists is astounding and can be credited to the Chinese professors teaching the building blocks of drawing, painting and printmaking. He also said the competition among artists is much more intense than in America.

Fehsenfeld's exhibit of her paintings will represent the

American perspective of China. She said what comes through in her paintings is the “energy and optimism” of the people. She traveled to rural mountain villages to capture parts of the culture that with development, is fast disappearing.

“I wanted to be there to record what may never be there again,” she said.