Camera, TV Inspire Burns' Art

By DORIS E. BROWN
Home News Staff Writer

Harrison Burns, the gamin-ish Rutgers graduate student and new art teacher at Rutgers Preparatory School in Franklin, finds his inspiration in the camera lens and on the television screen.

Photography by the slight 25 year-old from the South, who stands out from fellow students because of surprisingly short-cropped hair and clean-shaven face, is included in a significant exhibition that opens today and runs through May 1 at the Photo Film Workshop of Joseph Papp's New York Public Theater.

The show features a selection of remarkable, revealing black and white prints made by Burns and former students in a ghetto youth project he directed for two years in Atlanta, Ga. The 38 pictures were taken, developed and printed by Burns and black teen-agers participating in Project Enlarge in 1968-69.

Burns, who majored in both photography and painting at Atlanta School of Art, assumed direction of Project Enlarge during his last year of school and continued as its head for the succeeding year. He taught photography to 24 ghetto youths at a time, more than 100 all-told.

So successful was the project, that pictures by four of the participants were selected for a national youth photo show at the Colosseum in New York City. Burns is particularly proud, because "30 cities were invited to participate and out of 30 cities, only 30 photographs were accepted—four from my program."

He takes pride, too, in the acceptance of one photograph by a 16-year-old for reproduction in Infinity, the photography magazine.

"Shoot the Bones," a graphic, self-revealing selection of 150 photographs from the project, currently is on tour of the United States. The traveling exhibition, that includes a number of 6-foot-high blowups, will be in New York City early in the fall.

Black Georgia legislator Julian Bond was impressed by the traveling show, finding, "These photographs present a mirror image of the life of the photographers. Their lenses are their eyes. They have shown here what their days are like: What life is like for them." He concluded, "Their cameras are weapons."

After close of the current New York exhibition Burns hopes to "publish over the year several limited editions of these photos, a portfolio that will sell for $50-$75."

The graduate student, who three weeks ago was appointed art teacher for the lower school at Rutgers Prep, next has been invited to exhibit his unusual television-inspired paintings at the New York Public Theater. He's "not sure" about accepting the invitation, explaining, "I'm trying to put them in a gallery."

"You can see my paintings are basically photographs, too," said Burns, pointing to the large canvases in his Rutgers studio, each a picture of a television set with image on the screen.

The Real Thing

The kingsized TV images are enlargements of the real thing, he revealed. "I take slides of the TV image, I project the image make stencils, then I spray through the stencils," he explained.

Burns also collects old, inoperable TV sets for use in his art work. He gets them "just off the street, from friends, out of old garages. I've gotten seven out of the streets in New York."

Pointing to one painting mounted on the screen inside the set, he said, "I guess it is a piece of sculpture."

He added, "And I'm doing some paintings to surround TV sets, to put around them on a table or on something."

Burns, who grew up in the television age, explained, "The whole machine itself fascinates me." He said, "I'm just interested in the whole rhythm of television—the image." He considers this concern "actually sublimation."

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COLLECTS OLDIES — Burns dismantles old TV set one of many he collects "just off the street." He creates sculpture by mounting paintings inside sets, in Rutgers Campus studio.

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TV INSPIRED — Harrison Burns explains, "I'm really involved with the whole television industry," as he sits beside painting of TV set with stencilled image on screen.

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