

Skies take flight across the water

Performance a part of international project

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Look upward between 4 and 7 p.m. this Saturday and you might wonder. Is it a bird? A plane? Superman?

Well, sort of. The plane will be a Piper Super Cub, towing a 20-by-60-foot banner painted by German artist Michael Klant, with the help of Stetson University art professors Gary Bolding and Dan Gunderson.

And it took efforts that border on the superheric to paint its clouds — specifically clouds Klant photographed from a mountain in Germany's Black Forest.

Saturday's air show, called "German Sky Piece," will be a sequel to a 1999 performance over Freiburg, Germany. That performance, "Florida Sky Piece," featured a banner painted with Florida clouds and inspired the exhibit that opens Monday in Stetson's Duncan Gallery of Art.

The German artist was in the gallery this past week, setting up nearly 50 pieces that document that 1999 flight. Everything

was there, if not completely yet in place.

There were collages of maps, ropes, aeronautical instruments, old postcards, photographs and scale drawings from "Florida Sky Piece." There also were a series of experimental photographs and suites of prints based on the inspiration for the entire project, Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1820 poem "The Cloud."

The most visible part of the 1999 "Florida Sky Piece" already was on full view, however. That sailcloth banner hung from the ceiling, draped so that its bold 20-by-60-foot image was easy to see: white clouds on a bright blue Florida sky.

Klant, a professor at Freiburg's Institute of Art and one of four artists from the institute who showed his work at Stetson in 1998, studied the banner and considered different, more dramatic ways to display it.

Still, however dramatic the display, nothing could top the impact the banner made during its flight over the Gothic spires of Freiburg Cathedral last year.

And nothing is likely to be more dramatic than Saturday's near-repeat performance of that first flight, when Klant

The sky route

According to information available at press time, pilot Jim Butler will take off from Sky Dive DeLand at 4 p.m. Saturday (rain date, 4 p.m. Sept. 17), towing Michael Klant's banner behind his Piper Super Cub. He will fly to Daytona Beach, then south along the coast to Titusville and then northwest to Sky Dive DeLand, where he will jettison the banner at about 7 p.m. For final details, call (904) 822-7266.

reverses the process by putting a piece of German sky over Florida — and, at the same time, rounds out the project that began in 1998, when he took his first photographs of Florida's skies and clouds.

The final piece of the complex project will begin unfurling over Volusia County on Saturday, when Miami pilot Jim Butler swoops over Sky Dive DeLand in his Piper

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Super Cub and links up with the banner's harness.

The process has been planned to the smallest detail, from the route Butler will take to the performance's 7 p.m. finale, when the banner is to be jettisoned over Sky Dive DeLand.

Only one piece was still waiting to be prepared last week, but it was a big one — big enough to have Klant and Bolding discussing just how they and Gunderson would meet this weekend in a hangar at DeLand's airport. They planned to bring the brooms to be used as paint brushes, cans of blue and white paint, scale drawings based on Klant's sky photos and a small cardboard box that sat alone in the gallery.

It held the banner, acres of sheer white sailcloth bundled into a mass that would be stretched on a wooden frame in the hangar. Klant and his American colleagues planned to spend Saturday and today applying a thin sheet of blue acrylic — first on one side and then, once that one dried, on the other. Then, using the bristly brooms, they were to tap and smudge and flick gallons of white over the blue.

When the three artists finish painting and bundle the sky-stained sailcloth into the neat package that will be attached to Butler's Piper Cub, it will become a work of art. It also will become only one piece of a larger artwork that combines traditional techniques, conceptual and performance art and technology.

Like "Florida Sky Piece," the first step in the complex cluster of "pieces" that make up the total project — the artifacts from "Florida Sky Piece," cloud-related collages and prints and its final "piece," "German Sky Piece," the painting sprang from a deeper interest. "I worked on these pieces for the past two years — don't you think that's a long time?" he said, playfully and yet totally in earnest. "But I had been interested in clouds for a long time."



Check the skies Saturday for a scene similar to this. The performance, 'German Sky Piece,' will feature an image of Germany's Black Forest sky on a large banner that will be towed across the sky.

Klant walked across the gallery, to a series of large photo-murals that will hang behind Plexiglas panels printed with words from "The Cloud." The jagged black shapes of the words replicate Shelley's handwriting, and capture the essence of his working process, said Klant. The poem became his inspiration immediately, but it took a great deal of time and effort to track down the manuscript. He finally found it at Oxford, and arranged for the library to photograph its pages, which he then had transferred digitally onto sheets for exact duplication.

Every step of the process counts; each contributes to the complete work of art, he said. "I am the daughter of Earth and Water," Klant recited from memory, barely glancing at the page in "Florida Sky Piece," the book that documents the first performance and includes the poem.

"I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores; I change, but I cannot die," he said, and looked up. "That says it all."

Exhibit notes

"Florida Sky Piece," the banner and objects related to Michael Klant's 1999 performance, "The Shelley Cycle" and other works will go on exhibit at Stetson University's Duncan Gallery of Art during a reception set for 6 to 8 p.m. Monday.

The exhibit continues through Oct. 6 in Duncan gallery, in Sampson Hall on Stetson's campus, 421 N. Woodland Blvd., DeLand. Admission is free and regular hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday, 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. For more information, call (904) 822-7386.