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For Immediate Release

The Art-O-Mat has Landed

University Park, Illinois, September 20, 2005 – At first glance, visitors to the University Library at Governors State University might think it's now okay to smoke around the stacks.

Not so.

The new cigarette machine that catches the visitor's eye is none other than Art-O-Mat, one of many refurbished 1950s and 1960s cigarette machines popping up around the country. Each is unique and has one purpose in its new life: to vend pocket-sized original works of art in the shape of cigarette packages.

Art-O-Mat is taking the art world by storm, and Governors State's new Art-O-Mat is in good company. Similar machines are on display in the Chicago Cultural Center, New York's Whitney Museum, and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

Art-O-Mat is the invention of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, artist Clark Whittington. Whittington began the new Art-O-Mat craze when he refurbished his first machine in 1997. The concept was an immediate hit, and Whittington's Art-O-Mat machines have been featured on CBS, in Newsweek, the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times and Reader's Digest.

"Many believe art collecting to be an out-of-reach hobby," said Dr. Todd Rohman, the Governors State University English professor who launched a campaign to bring Art-O-Mat to Governors State, under the auspices of the university's Graduate Council Subcommittee for Intellectual life. "Now, almost anyone can be an art collector for about the price of a venti triple latte at Starbucks."

It wasn't an easy sell.

"They [subcommittee members] looked at me like I was nuts," Rohman said. "They couldn't believe I was serious about bringing a cigarette machine on campus. But once they saw it, the idea became, well, addictive."

Rohman said the university's provost, Dr. Paul Keys, understood the value of Art-O-Mat as an art installation and an important acquisition for the university.

"The Art-O-Mat is perfect for GSU, since community access is key to our identity," Rohman explained. "Where else can you begin a private art collection for five dollars?"

GSU's new Art-O-Mat hosts the work of 20 artists. The pieces include painting, photography, sculpture, metal work, jewelry, glasswork, and even miniature books.

Rohman added, "Another great feature of the machine is that it offers the opportunity for creative students to try their own hand at crafting small-format art." Accepted work could appear in one of over 80 machines nationwide.

"This opportunity could be a great way for our own local artists, poets, and writers to present their work to a broad audience" he said.

Those interested in doing so can view submission guidelines at www.artomat.org.

Visitors to the Governors State University Library, which helped sponsor the project,



Governors State University's new Art-O-Mat

may purchase \$5 Art-O-Mat tokens at the circulation desk and select their own one-of-a-kind piece.

"The variety and uniqueness of these small works of art are astounding. My colleagues will be receiving Art-O-Mat tokens for the holidays." noted Diane Dates Casey, dean of Library and Academic Services.

Half of the price of each piece goes to the artist, and the remainder is shared by Whittington and the host institution. The proceeds help maintain the machine and pay for new art.

Whittington, will visit the GSU campus in the coming months to present a slideshow to the public and discuss his process for rescuing these Americana artifacts. He will also be available to meet with those interested in producing some of their own pieces.