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Artist's 'Cultural Cartography' on display at McDaniel College

By DAVID SIMON
TIMES STAFF WRITER

A traveler riding west on a camel through the constantly shifting sand dunes of India's Thar desert is unlikely to see any fences, gates or walls as he crosses into neighboring Pakistan. The borderline — which cuts diagonally across the 77,000-square-mile desert — may have a few military checkpoints, but most of it is simply sand.

The interplay between geography and political boundaries is what has inspired artist James V. Banta to create his latest collection of paintings.

"I am interested in borders and the way that society defines countries," Banta said. "Those lines don't exist in reality, but they form our opinions, our identity."

Banta's exhibit, titled "Cultural Cartography," is on display at McDaniel College in Westminster until the end of March. This is the first time these paintings will be shown independent of other artists' work, Banta said.

The exhibit includes roughly 30 pieces — some being relatively abstract color schemes with lines and others more closely resembling actual maps. Banta is also showing several photographs of his travels.

Banta, 32, a New York City native, said he has been working on "Cultural Cartography" for the last three years. He said he was inspired to do the project by his travels around the world and his longtime love of maps.

Please see **Art Display, A8**



James V. Banta hangs a piece of artwork titled "The Battle of Lepanto" in preparation for the opening of his show, "Cultural Cartography," at the Esther Prangley Rice Gallery at McDaniel College in Westminster. The show containing paintings and photographs will run through March 26.

CHRIS AMMANN/
STAFF PHOTO

Page A8, Saturday, February 7, 2004

LOCAL/STATE

Art display

"Cultural Cartography" is on display at the Esther Prangley Rice Gallery at McDaniel College in Westminster through March 26. The gallery is open weekdays from noon to 4 p.m. To confirm hours or for more information, call 410-857-2595.

Art Display

From Page A1

In 1998, Banta visited India for three months and observed firsthand the conflicts the country has with Pakistan, he said. This led him to think about the actual differences between the two countries and how they originated, he said.

"On both sides of the line, it's the same," he said about India and Pakistan. "The countries are divided by years of historical conflict, but as you walk from one to another, it's practically the same."

Banta's painting of the Thar Desert is a broad swath of orangish brown divided by a thin, curvy white line representing the border.

Another of Banta's paintings, "The Holy Land,"



CHRIS AMMANN/STAFF PHOTO

Two photographs are ready to be hung for the "Cultural Cartography" show. The photographs are titled "Old Delhi," left, and "Jodhpur."

depicts the southeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea, the region that includes Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt.

The painting is of simple fields of color, intended to represent the bodies of water and land in one of the most volatile and violent places on

Earth, Banta said.

"I tried to think of it as just a place where people live," Banta said.

Banta, who has a master's degree in historic preservation, said he wants people who see his paintings to appreciate both the art itself and the ideas behind it.

"My goal is to strike a balance between making something that looks aesthetically pleasing and also gets across the message of the maps," Banta said.

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