

Dollops and squirts come to life

"New Paintings: Big Heads"
by Alden Mason, on view through
Feb. 27 at the Greg Kucera
Gallery, 608 Second Ave. Hours are
10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday
through Saturday.

by Deloris Tarzan
Times art critic

The man who calls himself "the original Skagit Valley artist" paints no mystic moons and no landscapes. Alden Mason, who grew up on a Skagit Valley farm and began his art career with watercolor landscapes, has been a long time off the farm.

After 32 years on the art faculty at the University of Wash-

VISUAL ARTS

ington, he retired in 1981 to paint full time — and still manages to infuse his paintings with freshness and childlike delight.

The "Big Heads" series at the Greg Kucera Gallery is composed of bright outline drawings that suggest the work of a preschooler. They are filled in with dollops and squirts of acrylic paint and shimmering lines, each color a continuous spaghetti that turns back on itself and nests against adjacent shades.

Squeeze bottles, not brushes, are the tools for these paintings, and Mason literally dances them over the canvas. Painting with the thick squeezed line permits him to integrate drawing into his painting — two functions that remained quite separate during the couple of decades in which he worked with oil paints. Mason earned a national reputation with the oils, wiping bright areas of paint into bubblelike bursts of lush color.

His drawings, meanwhile, concentrated on figures, marrying the abstract and the realistic in scenes that suggested fierce childhood fantasies. Now he's squeezed the styles together: "Purple Margery" and "Buffalo Billy" allow him to wing it with paint as he would with a pencil, squeezing out a continuous line without stopping to reload a brush. That line becomes a live wire, charging the paintings with visual electricity.

The lively quality is heightened by Mason's use of iridescent colors. The Grumbacher Co. ships iridescent white acrylic to him in gallons, to be mixed with color.

Mason gains some of his strongest effects from applying close-valued colors in rhythmic lines resembling a scalloped embroidery of paint — all against a dense black ground that makes the colors stand up and sing. From a dis-



Greg Kucera Gallery

'Napoleon' is a work of acrylic on canvas by Alden Mason.

woven of lustrous silk.

The big heads are, no fooling, big. Several of them, including one of "Napoleon," fill canvases 80 inches square.

But not everything is a head. "What Are You Doing in the Garden?" introduces a winking snake with a bow tie, sporting a red rose. Beside it hangs "Adam and Eve," expressed in a rainbow of pearly pastels. It's Eden all the way.

and/or has announced 31 awards in its program of Small Grants to Artists. The average grant size was \$400.

The artists and their projects are:

Joseph Bartscherer, for documentary photographs of the Dairy Farm Project; Jesse Bernstein, to assist writing a multi-media performance; Bruce Betz, for childcare to enable him to complete a screenplay; Laura Brenner, to assist research to complete a screenplay; Eduardo Calderon, to finance materials and travel for landscape photography in Eastern Washington; George Chacona, to assist realization of a multi-media project; and Michael Fajans, to provide time for him to work without specific commission.

Awards also went to Mark Frey, to assist preliminary design for a book of photographs of people in outdoor Northwest environments; Jon Gierlich, to develop

mance work; Jay Hamilton, to build a small keyboard instrument to work the opposite of a piano; Lynn Hamrick, to finish a photo project; Gordon Hempton, to assist production of a Seattle soundscape; Eric Jenson, to assist construction of a multitrack tape system; David Nechak, to develop studio space; and Barbara Noah, to assist in creation of a body of work using images of fire.

Other award winners were Charles Parriott, to develop a painting system for tempered glass; Jarrad Powell, to build a musical instrument for a gamelan (a percussion ensemble); Ray Sage, to videotape a performance work; Jake Seniuk, to support a photo installation using photo surveillance; Debra Sherwood, to assist research and production of a concrete relief panel; and Carl Smool and Iby Acosta, to plan a bilingual publication based on efforts to establish Managua, Nicaragua, as Seattle's sister city.

Also receiving awards were Jeff Stookey, to assist completion of a film quartet; Susanne Takehara, to assist exhibition of a photo-drawing collage; Robert Teeple, to assist multi-media presentation based on Orwell's "1984"; Karen Watts, to assist realization of a visual performance; Scott White, to enable use of video in a glass sculpture; and William Winship, to assist comple-