

Artist turns talent to sculpturing

By CORINNE ARATT

When Cecilia and Robert Reiner escaped from Hungary in 1946, a lot of what they took with them was in their heads. Married only shortly before their departure, she was 17 and he, 18.

As a youngster, she had been trained as an artist, and he had developed an interest in engineering. They continued their professional training while they were displaced persons in Germany for three years waiting to enter the United States and after they arrived here in 1949.

"Nov. 13, 1949 was my lucky day, that was the day President Harry Truman, God bless him, allowed 100,000 refugees to come into the United States," Mrs. Reiner said as she related in her sculpture studio wing of the couple's Farmington Hills home.

On a pedestal nearby was a bronze sculpture, "Princess and the Frog," which has a new home in the Japanese garden of Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Szepke of Bloomfield Hills.

THE EARLY development of interest in art has served Mrs. Reiner well. While in Germany, she studied art and fashion design at the University of Munich. After arriving in the United States, and still without a knowledge of conversational English, she found a job as a designer for the Irving Shop in downtown Detroit. "I tucked my little diploma under my arm and went to the shop to ask for a job," she said. The owner spoke German and was impressed enough with the 20-year-old woman to give her a chance to prove herself.

"He asked me how much I wanted a week. I said \$5 and he agreed and I couldn't believe it. Later, when I opened my own shop, he sent me all of his clients."

That was years after and the shop was called CR originals. Later, she specialized in handknit fashions and retired from the design and retail business in 1967 to pursue her first love, sculpture, fulltime.

MRS. REINER remembered the news of Truman's move that opened the doors here for World War II refugees, which brought such great joy, was accompanied by sorrow. Many of her relatives were still in Hungary. She wondered at the time if she would ever see any of them again. But, she and her husband were able to secure freedom for her parents, her brother and his family and her nephew, his wife and children.

For some of these persons, the journey across the border to freedom was a cliff-hanger that called for bribes.

She recalled her nephew and his wife didn't sleep for days after they crossed the border so fearful were they of being followed or kidnapped.

"Now," she said, "he is an electronic engineer, and they have a beautiful home."

And instead of a single room in which to raise a family, he has many rooms.

Mrs. Reiner remarked with a half smile, "This is one way to buy happiness with money."

SHE HAS visited the Iron Curtain countries only once since 1946. That was a trip to Romania and she cut it short, managing to endure two days and three nights before she left her tour group and returned home.

"Really and truly, I got down on my knees and kissed the ground when we landed," she said.

But, travel to free Europe has been common for her. She has been to Italy several times to study with sculptor Gyuia Varjas.

She recalled her first encounter with him. "He is about 50 years old. When I first looked at him, I thought he was Jesus Christ. The first time I was at his studio, I worked on a piece for about a week. When he finally commented on it, he said, 'What a piece of junk.'"

"Now is the time," I thought to myself, "I will either kill him or have a heart attack."

She didn't do either one. She worked with him for six weeks and admits now, "He made an artist out of me."

Mrs. Reiner works in wax, which is later cast in bronze. She also works with marble and alabaster. She said of marble, "It is extremely challenging—one wrong cut and the piece is finished."

She also implied that an experienced sculptor doesn't make many wrong cuts.

THE WRONG stone can also spell disaster. She favors alabaster and marble from Europe and recalled the commissioned piece, 30 inches high, on which the head fell off just as it was completed.

"I thought I'd die—absolutely have a stroke."

But that was the unusual, which rarely happens.

It has been Mrs. Reiner's good fortune to sell most of her pieces by word of mouth. Or, someone sees a piece in a friend's home and wants one by the same artist.

She has never been with a gallery because, so far, she hasn't needed one. Two of her pieces are on display with the Artists Guild, 3247 Franklin Road, Franklin.

The thing that puzzles her about American art buyers are that many buy as an investment.

"EUROPEANS BUY art for feeling and for what the artist has to say, but not for what it will bring as an investment."

The samples of work on display in the studio indicate the artist works in a realistic style. Her bronzes are

often either people or animals—children and adults from the fore and down to the comic.

"Anyone can learn craftsmanship. Feeling comes from really living—good and bad. Sometimes, I don't get out of the studio for three days when I'm working on something I can't leave. You know if you leave that particular movement at the time, you'll lose it."

It is many years since a small Hungarian girl dreamed of becoming a sculptor—close to four decades, but the dream has been realized.

In between, there has been a dramatic escape from tyranny, a career as a fashion designer, two children—Daniel and Peggy, now Mrs. Gerald Lauzon, and a reunification of a good portion of the family.

With her to share all of these memories is the man she married at 17, who understands work habits and art.

She recalls clearly their flight to freedom, how they were caught at the border and jailed and how her father put up bail giving them a chance to try again.

"To be honest, I don't think we had enough sense to realize the danger."

Whatever the reason, lack of fear or lack of sense, it signaled the beginning of a new life.



Bronze figure by Cecilia Reiner will be a focal point in a Bloomfield Hills garden.



Mrs. Reiner painstakingly shapes an alley cat in wax which will later be cast in bronze. (Staff photos by Harry Mauthe)

Bavarian symphony here on tour

A youth symphony from a Catholic school in Augsburg, Germany, will perform at 7:30 p.m. Aug. 8, in St. Agatha Catholic Church, during its Michigan tour.

Mark Radecki, of 2100 Greenhill, Farmington Hills, made all the arrangements for the concert, as well

as arranged for the members' housing while they are in this area.

The Michigan tour is sponsored by the Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp's International Program.

The 59 member group is directed by Benedictine Father Anselm Mayer. The classical symphony orchestra

music includes works by Mozart, Schubert and Haydn.

During the tour, the group will visit Grand Rapids, Traverse City, Grand Haven, Lansing, Detroit, and some metropolitan suburbs.

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Widowed club moves to Mercy Center

Widowed Persons has moved its meeting place from St. Fabian Catholic Church to Mercy Center. The group will meet in its new location at 7:30 p.m. Aug. 2. The center is lo-

cated at 2660 Eleven Mile. The meeting will be held in Room A.

The topic for discussion is "Choosing OK-ness," conducted by Sister Margaret Basso, IHM, and Jean Fe-

terl, who is the new program planner at Mercy Center.

The meeting is open to all widowed persons in the area. Admission of \$1 is asked at the door.

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