

Rock n' mime road show will be documented

By CORINNE ABATT

Blake Simmons discovered he can't drop the Friends Roadshow, subject of his recent photography exhibit at the Ed Gray Gallery.

Simmons, who has been making a living as a leathercraftsman, started taking pictures in 1970 when he was in Troy High School working on the yearbook and the student newspaper.

The Friends Roadshow, and Jango Edwards of Florida who originated the idea of the other mime shows, have invited Simmons that he plans to follow the show throughout Europe and North Africa this summer.

SIMMONS' PHOTOGRAPHS at the gallery were shown along with circus puppets made by Marie Ferrini. The two had previously shown their leather work under the name, Cat Dancers Leather, at many area art shows and fests.

He and Miss Ferrini will be designing and making costumes while they tour with the Friends Roadshow. However, Simmons also plans to document his adventures with cameras and diary to have a complete photo journal account.

During June some 60 groups of mimes, clowns, actors and entertainers will be performing simultaneously in the Netherlands under the all-encompassing name, "Festival of Fools."

Simmons will stay with Edwards show in Amsterdam and continue with

them when they play on the Mediterranean coast in Tunisia and North Africa at an art colony.

NEXT SUMMER, the Friends Roadshow will return to Ann Arbor for a two-month engagement. When the show played for four days in Rome last summer, the cast was overjoyed to learn that the Italian director, Federico Fellini, attended all the performances and later told Edwards he was the greatest clown in the world.

Edwards is scheduled to teach mime at the University of Stockholm for a month before the Amsterdam run.

Simmons' work, like Fellini's enthusiasm for Edwards' work said, "He's a genius and his work fascinates me. I'm totally behind the group, it's so refreshing to see them."

Simmons' photographs in the Ed Gallery show, (a few are still there) are the work of a photographer who understands and deals in fantasy. He is tuned in mentally to the antics—some ribald, some pure humor—of the clowns and mimes.

Simmons said he went to Europe last year with the specific goal of visiting the Salvador Dali museum in Spain.

I have always been captivated by surrealism," he said.

His photographs of the Friends Roadshow International evidence that interest. He likes to use a fisheye lens which distorts, particularly at the edges of the photograph. He likes to work with infrared film and sometimes finishes his work in sepia.



Blake Simmons of Troy will travel with the Friends Roadshow in Europe this summer and document his experiences with a photo-journal.



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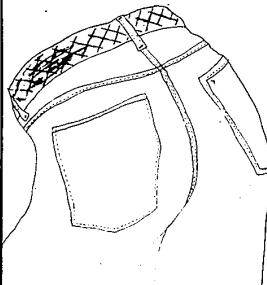
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