

# Artist gives new meaning to ordinary objects

Story: CORINNE ABATT  
photos: DICK KELLEY

"Beds and Chairs," the new exhibit at Lee Hoffman Gallery, deals with the most ordinary of subjects in an unusual way.

Detroit painter Elizabeth Hansell is responsible for the beds and sculptor Gary Kulak of Birmingham, the chairs. Ms. Hansell's contemporary still lifes of unmade beds, with their splendor of soft colors (pills) and deep involvement with light and shadow, evoke strange responses in viewers. Gallery owner Ms. Hoffman said some visitors have found these paintings of rumpled pillows, covers and sheets without people almost too sensual to contemplate for very long. While other visitors see them simply as examples of fine workmanship, these same paintings will touch off a kind of pleasant reverie in others.

LIKE THE 17th century Dutch painters whose still lifes of a table and meal just completed suggest the presence of people not shown, Ms. Hansell's beds appear still warm from just being vacated. The people who tossed the covers aside have just stepped into the bathroom to brush teeth or over to the window to see the sunrise.

Ms. Hansell said, "It was fun to see how abstract I could be with something very real."

This combination of realism and abstract offers fertile territory for the

viewer's imagination as did some of the great writers of the past century. Tolstoy, for instance, would set the scene for lovemaking, subtly suggest what was happening, but leave the details to his reader's imagination.

KULAK'S STEEL chairs are a good combination with Ms. Hansell's paintings of intricate through random folds. His forms are definitive, challenging and positive. How could a sculptor work in steel and not be positive? Ms. Hoffman said she has been amazed at Kulak's development as an artist in the past two years. This growth, or development, if you will, is evidenced in the present exhibit.

From traditional chair forms in steel which range from book end size to six feet high, Kulak has taken to breaking up individual chair forms. This step adds dramatically to his growth as a sculptor. Frequently he cuts the back panel where in a full size chair the shoulders would hit. Once cut, it is moved out of line with its companion piece creating tension in the opposing forces. One bent from their traditional line, these parts of the chair take on a life of their own, defining space, and getting off a counter flow of energy that was once neatly channeled.

The image of the chair becomes distorted, unpredictable and changing as the viewer moves around the steel pieces.

All of the shadings and patterns in the steel came about in the sculptural

process. Kulak found he had created shadings and colors by the use of the cutting torch and tools to shape the metal. He left them, but didn't add to by any other means.

Working in steel comes naturally to this Cranbrook graduate, who was born and raised in the steel capital of America, the area around Pittsburgh, Pa. After high school he went to Bethany College intending to become a chemical engineer, "something I was programmed to do," he said.

He remembers the moment when he walked into the college art studios in the basement under the college tower and the feeling that underground space evoked.

Later he transferred to Clarion State College to major in education for the mentally retarded and his second confrontation with art took place when he picked up a course in art and architecture to fill an elective.

GRADUALLY THE commitment to art was forged and the Rumanian

sculptor Brancusi became his hero. He still talks about Brancusi and his work as one of the great forces in his development.

The chair form has occupied almost all of Kulak's time and interest for the past five years.

He has built all sizes — from small to large wood and steel ones. Kulak isn't finished with chairs — still to come is a series of 18 foot high outdoor pieces.

From trying to discover what other

sculptors such as Brancusi and Rodin felt as they were working, he has moved to establishing his own identity. This internal growth, never easy or quick, has resulted in the show at the Lee Hoffman Gallery. Kulak's career will be an exciting one to watch. Steel in the hands of a sensitive individual holds surprises that are hard to imagine without actually seeing them.

The show will continue at the gallery through Feb. 7. The gallery, 538 N. Woodward, is open Tuesday-Saturday, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

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## Joffrey Ballet comes for 7 performances

The Joffrey Ballet will return to Ford Auditorium for a record number of seven performances with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra Feb. 21-25.

The ballet company made its first Detroit appearance in many years three seasons ago as the guest of the DSO. The reception in this area was so overwhelming that plans for a return engagement were made immediately, resulting in a continuing annual series of performances.

The opening performance, at 8:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 21, will feature Arpino's "Suite Saint-Saens," music by Saint-Saens, two ballets by Ashton, "Monotones II," music by Satie, and "A Wedding Bouquet," music by Lord

Berners, and a second ballet by Arpino, "Trinity," with music by Raph and Hol-drige.

The second performance will be Thursday evening, Feb. 22, at 8:30 p.m. It will include Ashton's "Les Patineurs" with music by Meyerbeer, Ariza's "Chopin Preludes," music by Chopin, Arpino's "Chouros," music by Drigo, and Robbins' "New York Export Op. Jazz," music by Prince.

For the third performance, Friday evening, Feb. 23 at 8:30 p.m., the Joffrey Ballet will dance Robbins' "Interplay," music by Gould, Achard's "Con Amor," music by Adam, de Mille's "A Bridegroom Called Death," music by Schubert.

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