

Worlds of art, fashion merge in Ruth Poris' studio

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

She's got to have art.

But for Ruth Poris, art intertwines with practicality. The Farmington Hills potter tempers her desire to fashion something of her own from clay with the realization that her products should sell.

"I'm a professional potter, not a middle class housewife with a cute wheel in a garage. I don't have that disposition. I'm used to working," she said.

Yet when she learned that the Detroit Institute of Art tour would view her studio the same afternoon as John Glick's workshop, she was bowled over. "His work has integrity," she said. "I'm honored to be in the same tour."

It was this combination of pragmatism and artist that led her to her career of designing porcelain, jewelry and flowers as well as wind chimes for major department stores and jewelry firms.

She studied at the Art Students' League of New York and graduated from New York University. After years of teaching, she realized on day in 1973 she wanted to quit the classroom.

"WHEN THE KIDS were little I was teaching school and I didn't have time to indulge myself."

"One day, I walked out of school and said to myself, 'that's it.' I just didn't like it anymore."

Instead she devoted her days to studying for a new occupation. First, she considered architecture, but that would require more time in school than she wanted to invest. Then, she considered landscape design.

"But one day, I bought a flower pot in Livonia Mall. On the way home, I admired the pot and I was thinking to myself, 'Gee, I'd love to do that.'"

For two years, she pursued the idea of making a pretty flower pot. Landscape design had long fallen by the wayside. She spent her time studying her craft at Oakland Community College, putting in 10 hour days.

Planters, mugs, bowls and windchimes were the products of her apprenticeship in her new career. She exhibited at shows. She showed her products at the Ann Arbor Art Fair.

It was the art fair that led to her commercial ventures. Her jewelry was disaster at the art fair. While she sold everything else, the jewelry remained after the fair.

WHILE THE BARGAIN hunters went elsewhere, a buyer from Chicago and a gallery owner bought the flowers she was selling.

Disappointed, she took the porcelain buds to her sister in New York and asked for advice.

"She had several friends in and they were looking at them over the kitchen table. They were saying 'I want that one and that one.'"

"I had the wrong market."

Her brother-in-law who works for



Standing among samples of her work, Ruth Poris examines some of the driftwood windchimes. (Photo by Allen Schlossberg).

Miriam Haskell was her introduction to that jewelry firm. He took her work in for the firm's designer and fashion coordinator to view.

After three months, she was about to ask them to send back her work when they mailed her a picture of a trumpet lily and asked her for a porcelain version.

She sent them three dozen styles in 12 colors. The firm asked her to bring in samples of her work.

"I brought everything."

And Miriam Haskell bought everything.

"I was crazy that year. Bottles, butterflies, flowers — they bought everything. That's when I started looking for help."

BUT IN TRAINING helps she discovered a gap between art and commerce. Some potters don't want to continue making the same design. Some helpers tried to innovate.

After training one helper, Ms. Poris asked the woman to go home and practice making one dozen lilies. The woman returned with several variations.

"I just can't make the same thing over and over," she explained to Ms. Poris.

"But that's what they ordered," Ms. Poris tried to explain in return.

Artists who won't bend to the re-

quirements of commerce can "keep on making mugs," she said.

"I would love to have everything I do be a work of art. But I can't do that," she said.

For her pottery is a job — not a hobby.

Her attitude toward her work can be seen in the order she keeps in her workshop and in her studio. Although she calls it "the mad house" there is an order to the clutter. Different beads are

relegated to their own bin in her sunny workshop in back of her home.

AGAINST THE WHITE WALLS of the small workshop hand colored pieces of pottery with the formula for achieving a particular shade written on them.

Ms. Poris moves efficiently around the one workbench unmindful of the fact that her dark brown slacks are smudged with dust from the unfinished pots.

Homeowners' group seeking support

Farmington Hills residents opposing the senior citizen-low income housing project on Freedom and Drake roads are gearing up for its confrontation with city council on April 23.

The group, from the Freedom, Beechwood and Gill Homeowner Association, is circulating petitions to protest the complex which would be financed by Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) bonds. The group opposes the proposed

project's height (six stories) and the accompanying low and moderate income housing. That group has been working in conjunction with homeowners in Farmington who also oppose the project.

The proposed project would be built on the border between the two cities.

Persons interested in further information about the petition drive should call 478-1348.



Jewelry is displayed in the Poris studio by using a variety of props, like this antique glove stand. (Photo by Allen Schlossberg)

THE INSIDE * ANGLE

LIVING WITHOUT ELECTRICITY is a miserable experience. After working to restore power in the area, even the usually maligned utility companies were the object of some good will. Third and fourth grade girls in Virginia Jahnke's Sunday school wrote thank-you letters to the linemen, recently.

Decorated with drawings of hearts and light bulbs (you were expecting flowers?) the notes say the same things a lot of grown-ups were thinking last week.

"Thank you for working so hard," wrote Monique Archaubau. "Thanks for turning on my cousin's electricity. I hope you have a happy Easter. Thanks and God bless you all. Love and happy Easter to you and your families."

Another student at Farmington Hills Baptist Church Sunday school, Lindsay Ritter, wrote: "Thank you for fixing our lights. We had two days with the lights off. I'm happy that we have our lights on and I'm glad that we have our lights on at the Baptist church. Thank you very much. We had a lot of trees fall down."

Angles figures even utility companies need love sometimes.

HEALTH-O-RAMA '79, sponsored by the United Health Organization and the Women for United Foundation, will offer free health tests on April 30, May 1-3 at Tel-Twelve Mall 28890 Telegraph, Southfield.

Tests for anemia, diabetes, hearing disabilities, blood pressure, height, weight, urinalysis and vision will be available free to people 18 and older.

'STORMY WEATHER took its toll on traffic lights in the Farmington area last week. Drivers may notice that the timing on some of the lights is off. IA knows there are many drivers who always believed the traffic lights in the cities weren't timed correctly.

A FREE SERIES of weekly lectures for heart patients and their families will be offered at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak on six consecutive Wednesday evenings, which began on April 18.

Exercise — myth and reality will be the topic of the April 25 discussion. Coping with heart disease at home will be discussed on May 9 and stress and relaxation response will be the subject of the May 16 meeting. Nutrition will be the closing topic on May 23.

Presented through the hospital's cardiac rehabilitation center, the sessions are designed to give an understanding of the heart and the rehabilitation process. Each program will include informal discussion. The lectures will be conducted from 7-8:30 p.m. with the exception of May 1.

On that day, a three-hour cardio-pulmonary resuscitation class will be conducted. Lectures will be led by a staff nurse and pharmacist, exercise physiologist, psychiatrist, psychologist and

dietitian. Enrollment is limited. Call Beaumont at 288-9425 for reservations.

FARMINGTON HILLS CITY HALL

WAGS are making little comments about the quality of writing evident in police reports. IA wouldn't say the writing's bad — just confusing. Angles figures this is just another example of the demise of the English language.

MAYBE THAT'S why one former police captain there retains the reputation for not reading the reports — just signing them. Angles can understand that. Not only was it easier, it left more time for lunch. Hamburgers, anyone?

WHILE ANGLES IS ON the subject of city government, it recently noted that the Farmington DPW has a few hidden stars on its payroll. Not only did it once have a David Jones, but Bob Hope also works for the DPW there. Maybe they'll make a movie, "On the Road to Dust Control."

ANGLES SALUTES the long suffering secretaries of the world for National Secretaries Week, April 22-28.

TRAVELING? The Crowell Opera House and Fine Arts Association is sponsoring a summer musical theater beginning on June 27. This season's offerings at the third oldest continuously operated theater in the country include: "Brigadoon," "Godspell" and "Pumpkin Girl." The theater is at 129 E. Maumee in Adrian. For further information, call 1-517-263-5674.

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