

She carries her art gallery in her notebook

By CORRINE ABATT

Susan Babb promotes and sells art. The 33-year-old Troy resident, determined to develop an appreciation for contemporary (mostly young) Michigan artists, squares off against galleries

which intimidate browsers and bluntly spells out the need to educate potential art buyers.

"I'm an educator," she said. "I've gone into being an art agent to commu-

nicate to the public that we have quality art in Michigan, and it is available.

"I've gone into many galleries and if you don't look like you have money to spend, they don't ask if you're interested."

While she was matter-of-factly denouncing some galleries, she singled out Gertrude Kase, who formerly had a contemporary gallery in the Fisher Building, for praise.

"She would tell you about the artists, answer questions and let you look through her books."

TRAINED AS A TEACHER for the emotionally impaired, at one time she taught classes at the Cranbrook Museum of Academy of Art Museum. That's how she became acquainted with some of the artists whose work she now handles.

In all she represents 15 sculptors, painters and weavers. Most have graduate degrees and beyond. Valerie Dearing, fibers, is on the faculty at Central Michigan University. Elissa Olenych, painter, teaches at Albion and received her masters in fine arts at Cranbrook. Photographer Nick Lauer teaches photography at Roper School. Sculptor Jeff Spaulding, who teaches at Albion, has his masters from the University of

Pennsylvania.

Spaulding, Ms. Dearing and Ms. Olenych are also on the faculty of the Blisswood summer art program sponsored by Albion College at Good Hart north of Petoskey.

Some of the others Ms. Babb represents are Ken Fadeley, Cranbrook-trained sculptor; Jim Rutkowski, Birmingham Indian and antique collector and contemporary artist; and Suzanne Carol Kanyha, painter, who recently completed her degree at Marygrove.

Ms. Babb knows her artists well enough to talk about their work from a personal point of view.

"There are a lot of artists I turn down because I can't relate to their pieces," she said. "And I have to have a good relationship with an artist if I'm going to be the business manager."

"I'm interested in very contemporary art — I don't want to look at barns or Sunday painters," she said. "These people I represent are educated, they can paint barn scenes, but they have moved beyond that."

So far, Ms. Babb has been selling through designers, architects and builders, being careful to differentiate "designer art" from "quality Michigan

art." She shows the slides she carries in a notebook, talks about the artists, finds out what the person might be interested in seeing and works from there.

"Builders," she said, "want to hear about money, benefits and tax-writes-offs. Other people will frequently ask if they can get a deal. I ask 'can you get a deal from a dentist?'"

SHE WON'T CUT PRICES for anyone, nor will she barter. Ms. Babb said the art she has is modestly and fairly priced and her commission, 20 percent, is far less than most galleries.

In her sales-education talk, she has answered many questions that indicate to her that most people have a narrow view of artists. She frequently has to explain that these are working people who have studied for many years to be able to produce that art. They aren't dilettantes, hippies or people who failed at other jobs.

She said she runs into the attitude that if they haven't shown in New York, they can't be very good.

Her answer to that is, "These people live and work here in Michigan."

While she is happy with what she's doing now, Ms. Babb added, "Who's to say that in three or four years, I might not have my own gallery?"



Along with finding buyers for contemporary Michigan sculpture, paintings and weavings, Susan Babb hopes to establish the state as a place where quality art is available. (Staff photo by Dick Kelley)

Art association elects trustees

Joyce LaBan's program committee arranged a series "Art in the New City," which included lectures by Michael Farrell, art historian; artist Glen Michaels, architect Gio Rossetti, sculptor Ron Watson and Mrs. Peggy Brandt, vice chairman for the Michigan Council for the Arts.

At the annual meeting of the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association recently, president Doris Roeder capitalized the achievements of the organization over the past year.

She said, "Due to the efforts of literally hundreds of people, this has been a banner year for the BBAA. Membership has increased, more classes have been offered, and more students have been enrolled than at any time in the past — close to 3,000."

In recapping recent events she said, a new 4,704 square foot addition has been completed, a full schedule of exhibitions, various educational programs and fun and fund-raising events have been held.

During the past year the exhibition committee, headed by Trudy Hartman, mounted five art association sponsored shows, including a faculty show, a gift buying show, two student shows and a national competitive exhibition entitled, "The Enchanted Object: Toys and Games."

For the sales and rental gallery, Janet Clarke and her committee selected Michigan artists and featured the "Artist of the Month."

Community service chairman Cathie Pollock served as liaison for the Picture Lady program, which trains volunteers to offer art appreciation programs to elementary school children.

Under a grant from the Michigan Council for the Arts, the art association has worked closely with the Birmingham schools in setting up art enrichment workshops.

Career field trips for interested junior and senior high school students are coordinated by Page Yeager and Jean Schuler, and art tours to various studios, art galleries and museums have been sponsored.

The art association participated in the Birmingham Winter Carnival and also assisted the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce during the recent Village Fair, in setting up store window displays featuring works of Michigan artists.

Several fund raising events were held — a Christmas Party with holiday gift shopping, a dinner and theater night, an art supply garage sale and The May Fair — and a "fun-raiser," "Come Play with Me" party.

The social committee, chaired by Jan Wood, as well as providing refresh-

ments for events, produced the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association's first cook book, "Artful Eating," and is currently working on a supplement.

Newly elected to the 1979-80 Board of Trustees were: William Saunders, second vice president; Claudia Ireland, recording secretary; Mrs. George Wirth, community service; Mrs. Thomas Goad, education; Jack U. Klarr, house and grounds; James D. Osmer, legal; Mrs. Woods Proctor, membership participation; Mrs. Weldon Yeager, special events; Robert J. Machus and Robert Zolad, members at large.

Continuing on the board are: Mrs. Arthur Salzman, first vice president; Robert K. Victor, treasurer; Trudy Hartman, exhibition; Mrs. Harry Velick, membership; Mrs. Myron LaBan, program; Mrs. Norman E. Clarke, rental and sales gallery; Mrs. Warren Wood, Jr., social; Mrs. A. Donaldson and Victor Klein, members at large, and Mrs. William Squires, public relations.

Paul Averill, C.A. Hall and Mitchell Kafarski continue as advisors. The Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, a community sponsored art center, is at 1516 S. Cranbrook. Its programs, exhibitions, classes, tours, special events and services are open to the public. For further information, call 644-0666.

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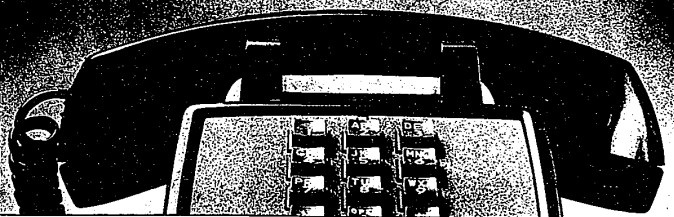
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