

# Rivera rediscovered by archivist

By CORINNE ABATT

Since she began assembling archives for the Detroit Institute of Arts, Marilyn Ghausi of Bloomfield Hills has made some interesting finds.

But, none before — and probably none after — will rival her discovery of Diego Rivera's working drawings for his "Detroit Industry" frescoes. They are on the four walls of the inner fountain court in the museum's main building.

Mrs. Ghausi came to the museum in March of last year to organize the historical records. Intended to be a short term project, it was funded with a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Committee (NHPRC).

It was an ideal job for her because in addition to seven years experience as an archivist, she had specialized in art history and American history at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts.

As of last October, the archives project was made a permanent museum department with a staff of two, Mrs. Ghausi and Claudia Hommel.

THE STEPS LEADING TO the discovery of the drawings, called cartoons, a word that comes from the Italian "cartone" meaning pasteboard, in retrospect, seem logical.

The idea to organize an archives came from the museum's Archives of American Art. The grant application was written from there.

Fortunately, Mrs. Ghausi had a background in both art and organizing archives. In her work at the museum she had established that the cartoons did exist from correspondence between Clyde Burroughs, then director of the museum, and Rivera. Burroughs asked if the museum could keep the preliminary drawings and Rivera responded affirmatively, making them a gift.

Up until last April the search to find the cartoons had been fruitless. But, on April 28, Mrs. Ghausi went out on an enormous storage room looking for some architectural drawings.

"I crossed over to the opposite corner and I saw rolls eight and nine feet high wrapped in plain paper — there were no markings. I unrolled a shorter one on a table. As I did, it passed through my mind that this must be the Rivera cartoons. I opened the first one in a dark room and it was a thrilling moment," she said.

If she hadn't known what she was looking for, the cartoons might still be there, for the first marks she saw were sparse charcoal lines, not images.

WHEN SHE RETURNED to tell the staff and they gathered to watch as the cartoons were unrolled on the floor of the North Court, Mrs. Ghausi said, "The pastel was so fresh, it was incredible. This was the first time they had been unwrapped in 46 years."

SHE ATTRIBUTES their generally excellent condition to the somewhat dark, air-conditioned, cool room and being well wrapped for storage.

The cartoons contain the drawings for nine of the total 27 panels. Some are charcoal, several are black, red and brown chalk. Rivera used his colors for the drawings of the two nude fertility figures — and with these he achieved a warm lush sepi.

Traditionally, fresco artists attached their working drawings to the walls and used them for tracing. Rivera, Mrs. Ghausi said, placed another sheet over these, traced on that and then transferred the lines to the walls.

"These cartoons are working drawings, not the same as the frescoes. There were some changes," she said. "There was an exhibit of them in 1933 and then they disappeared."

The museum staff feels these are the only ones Rivera did. Satisfied with them he went ahead without making more. Apparently he decided he had the proper scale and approach and could work from his smaller sketches well enough.

ARTISTS CUSTOMARILY do the entire fresco on paper in the colors it will appear on the wall. Rivera, however, a master of his art, made a color chart for the chemist to follow for mixing pigments and left the rest to his own judgment. In frescoes the paint is applied while the specially prepared plaster is still wet. The artist must work quickly and surely before the paint dries and becomes part of the wall.

The cartoons were on public display for two days last week. The estimate is that it will take the conservation staff about a year, working full-time, to clean and mount them properly. Spacewise, they also present problems — the largest is nine feet high and 26 feet wide.

The next public showing of the car-

toons will be during the 50th anniversary year of the Rivera frescoes in 1983.

While it might have been difficult for Mrs. Ghausi to come back to reality after her discovery of the drawings, she has succeeded.

She said that the boxing and labeling of 500 cubic feet of records in the north loft is completed and records from many of the various departments have been included.

"I have found some very beautiful architectural drawings of beaux arts architect Paul Cret," she said. "He designed the building and these are beautiful renderings and blueprints of the original building."

NEXT NOV. 29, there will be an exhibition of the archives in the director's reception area, open to the public, "to show the things we've found," Mrs. Ghausi said. "The archives contain the

records of the museum from the beginning and show how it functions. We've been collecting a lot of photographs of the collections and the first building."

The earliest records date from 1876. She said there are also papers relating to the Detroit Art Association of 1879, the group which gave rise to the Detroit Institute of Arts. All of the papers of the first directors have been found and labeled.

It may sound like a tedious profession to some, but it suits Mrs. Ghausi perfectly. In fact when she and her husband, Mohammed, dean of engineering at Oakland University, go to China later this year, she's hoping to be able to see some of the seldom-visited archives of the Orient.

The couple have two daughters Nadja, 16, a student at Andover High School and Simine, 15, who just completed her final year at West Hills Junior High.

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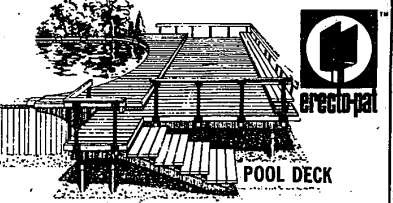
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