

# Legacy of 'Provenance'

## World art market—story of glitter, tragedy

By CORINNE ABATT

Eight years ago Frank McDonald, Michigan-born author of the new best seller, "Provenance," was sitting in solitary confinement in Cuba. His interrogator and only contact with the world warned him that it could be 30 years before his release.

McDonald, 29 at the time, product of St. Pauls and Austin schools in Grosse Pointe, Notre Dame and Oxford, pictured himself slowly making his way down the ramp of an airport in Ireland at 55, white-haired, thankful to be alive, grateful for open sky, sun and Ireland where he planned to live.

Three months later, McDonald was put on a plane for Madrid. As he was boarding, he turned to look back. His interrogator, standing on a balcony of the airport in civilian clothes, gave him a quick salute. McDonald returned it. They had reached a kind of mutual respect, close to a friendship. McDonald had turned down an offer to be a counter-spy. Still, charges against him had been dropped.

"The Cubans," he said, "are very so-

phisticated. They're a very volatile people — tough people. They have a reputation in the Caribbean of being very ambitious, very hard working."

McDonald did go to Ireland — earlier than he had expected. He planned to write about Cuba and he did, "but I'm not going to publish that, at least not now, it's too personal," he said.

It was when he tried to buy a desk at an auction for his 18th century stonehouse in County Cork that the idea for "Provenance" was born. He failed to get the desk, he was told, because he bid against "the ring."

HE WONDERED if the rings extended beyond furniture to art. And that speculation led him to question what happened to the great European art collections looted by Goering and Hitler during World War II.

His two years of research for the novel, based on fact, took him to many parts of the globe, into the underground art world as well as the museum, and to recently declassified documents in the National Archives.

"Everything is true in the book," he said, "but the part about the cata-

combs. They are symbolic of the underground art world."

His story bridges three generations of the Rosland family of art dealers, moves quickly from Rome to London, New York and Paris and back again. It deals in intrigue, romance and mystery, splashed with vast amounts of money, beautiful women and at least one, dashing, adventuresome man, Alex Drach. But, in the world of art, wealth isn't counted in dollars, but master paintings. Knowing where they are, how to acquire them, outsmarting the competition with every device in the book — that's the name of the game.

The action in the book is fast-paced, sometimes shocking and cruel, but always interesting.

THE BLUE-EYED McDonald whose black curly hair is generously flecked with gray, talks as he writes — with drama, style and an admirable lack of affectation.

Spanish words and French phrases fall from his tongue easily. He searches longer for an appropriate Greek expression, and praises the box-in-box plot-



FRANK McDONALD

ing style of one of his favorite authors, Lawrence Durrell in "The Alexandria Quartet." To his list of favorite writers he adds Frederick Forsyth (in his best times) and Tolstoy.

McDonald does some of this box or cameo-type plotting in "Provenance," later tying the strings of continuity. He never, however, moves above the easy to follow plot style as Durrell does of ten leaving the first time reader wondering when, how, and if ever, the loose ends will fit together.

McDonald, who is now far along on another book about the world diamond market, already appropriately titled, "Facets," doesn't find the level or passion and excitement in this subject as he did in art.

"I NEVER UNDERSTOOD what art could do to somebody. It's called eye-paasion or eye-appetite . . . dealing with art is a sexy business."

Although "Provenance" was completed more than a year ago, questions about the subject still hang in McDonald's mind and like a busy, benevolent parent, he is willing to bequeath them to someone else.

"I wish somebody would pick up where I left off and find out where these paintings are. They're out there — in Swiss banks — or Montreal where

a lot of stolen art moves. The mobs are into stolen art. Someone could find out what paintings are missing, have a catalog of them made up. And I think somebody ought to write a non-fiction book about the way the art world works — do a story on the market place."

He also thinks Madame Claude of Paris, after whom Madame Gerard in the book is patterned, could be followed up. The ladies, real and fiction, ran what amounts to a Western version of a Giesha House where men came to be entertained by beautiful, cultured women who often proved to be assets to their professional lives as well as personal ones. The world's power brokers frequented Madame Gerard's in the book.

A NON-COLLECTOR, McDonald is convinced that great art is an equally great investment.

"You will never see a drop in the price of a great work of art," he said. "The importance of the auction is critical. The auction rooms are the stock exchange for the art world."

### club circuit

**DETROIT NORTH SUBURBAN ALUMNAE ASSOCIATION**, Alpha Delta Pi, open the season at Delta Pi, tonight with the group's traditional potluck supper in the Royal Oak home of Carole Gilbert, 4029 Yorba Linda.

Ms. Gilbert's co-hostesses are Dorothy Biglow and Dorothea Clarke. Members are asked to bring a salad, main dish or dessert.

Lindy Juergens, the group's new president, asks Alpha Delta Pi alumnae, new to the area, to call Kathy Sigwin, 878-9176.

**SAVING SENSE**, a coupon and refunding group, meet on Mondays and Thursdays. Persons wishing information about the coupon exchange are invited to call Sharon Stein, 477-6673.

**FARMINGTON ARTISTS CLUB** meets at 7 p.m. on Mondays and Thursdays. Oct. 8 in Farmington Hills Community Library on 12 Mile Road to hear guest speaker Igor Begier.

Beginner will give a critique on members' works, as they begin to prepare for their fall show and sale. He is a member of Eastern Michigan University's art department.

**FARMINGTON AMATEUR RADIO CLUB** meets at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 8 in Room 101-G, Farmington High School, 32000 Shawwassee Road. All meetings of the club are open to all persons interested in amateur radio.

**CONGREGATION BETH 'ACHIM SISTERHOOD** begins its Wednesday series "The Quality of Jewish Life in the '80s" at 9:30 a.m. Oct. 8 in the synagogue's youth lounge, 21000 12 Mile Road, Southfield.

Rabbi Gerald Teller, superintendent of United Hebrew Schools, will speak

**FOCUS ON LIVING**, (with cancer) meets at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 9 in Orchard United Methodist Church, 30450 Farmington Road.

The group is sponsored by American Cancer Society to bring together patients and family members who have questions, or are experiencing problems as a result of living with cancer.

Participants of the self-help group are encouraged to discuss their mutual problems in a positive manner.

Inquiries will be taken by calling the society, 557-5353.

**AMERICAN BUSINESS WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (ABWA)**, Mayflower Charter Chapter, begins its second year with meetings at 5:30 p.m. the second Monday of the month in Mayflower Hotel, Plymouth.

The group invites working women who are interested in learning about the international organization to call

Sue Szoff, 455-2446, or Judy Tigani, 478-2567.

The next meeting begins with cocktails, followed by dinner, then a program by Bob Fulton from Michigan Eye-Bank, on Oct. 13.

Michigan Eye-Bank is the state project for Michigan Lions Clubs.

Fulton's talk is called "Sharing the Gift of Sight."

**45 AND UP CLUB**, a new group comprised of divorced, widowed and single persons in the area, have found a permanent home in the 47th District Court building on 10 Mile Road, east of Farmington Road.

The group meets tonight at 8 p.m. there, and will continue to meet there on the first Thursday of every month planning social events.

"These are things we can do together that we might not do alone," said Bea Holt, who brought the new club together.

Newcomers are invited to join the group tonight, or call Ms. Holt for inquiries, 474-9258.

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### Oak Hill staff honored

The staff at Oak Hill Nursing Home honored its own with its first annual service award banquet recently. Each honored employee was awarded a service pin, and a brief synopsis of each employee's contribution was read.

The gold award service pin is oval with the imprinted name of Oak Hill encircling an oak tree. "It is our symbol of strength, dignity and endurance, all words which are synonymous with the aged," said personnel director Maurine A. McDonald.

Special honors and plaques were given to Anne Hane, in-service coordinator; Lorraine Dormier, food service

supervisor; and Sally Mattmueller, clinical director.

LORETTA TUCKER, a nurse aide with Oak Hill Annex for 24 years, received a standing ovation at the banquet.

"She is an extremely vivacious and dedicated individual whose inexhaustible energy has always been directed towards helping others," Ms. McDonald said.

Other nurse aides who took bows were Gay Cushman, Linda Heaton, Denise Hoffman and Anne Horal.

Nurses who were honored were Joan Briscois and Pat Prather.

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