

Work stands on its own; no need for explanations

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

Seeing Richard Culling's show at Xochipilli Gallery, 648 Woodward, Birmingham, without the artist in the gallery is like watching a good movie without a sound track.

Certainly, he, like most artists, wants his work to stand on its own without explanation.

And it does. But it's a lot of fun when he's there to do a bit of translating, which sounds like comedian-style double talk until the listener's ear manages to break it down into words.

For two years, Culling has been doing three-dimensional paintings, mounted in boxes or deep frames. His brother, Robert, builds the boxes for him.

The interior flat surface and sides of the box are part of the painting. Quite often the painting is done on canvas or paper and then attached to these surfaces.

THEN HE continues doing figures and other elements on a separate surface, canvas or paper. He mounts these on wood and has a friend, Dominic Macert, who is handy with a jigsaw, cut

these out. Then he mounts them in the box, so the painting becomes a three- or four-surface assemblage.

Until 1979, Culling, born and raised in Livonia and a graduate of Stevenson High School (his art teacher there was Ken Rose), did large, two-dimensional works.

He knew he had been wise to make a change as soon as he completed his first three-dimensional work which is part of the current show.

For inspiration, Culling draws from his personal home and family experiences, literature, the Bible and art history. Then, he adds a twist of humor

and often blends old and new with a kind of painterly bravado.

THE FIRST one he did has faces in the foreground, strongly reminiscent of a man and woman in a Da Vinci painting. The background is mountains from a Da Vinci painting and just in front of them is a section of landscape along Northville Road by Hines Park near Northville.

"What I was trying to do is redo an Italian painting in a German style. My family background is German," Culling said, as if to explain the slightly more

solid look to the features of his couple who still have an old master Renaissance air about them.

In "Ascended Masters," there's an august, assembled group of painters of the past — El Greco, Rubens, Raphael... Only one is wearing a robe, the rest are nude. An alligator at the feet of the robed one, Culling explained, "That's from Rubens."

In a small work that has the head and shoulders of Christ in the foreground with the curve of a cave opening on one side there is a contemporary home on a riverfront with a couple near the dock in the background.

the family has vacationed as the background setting. But all sorts of things are going on around the cottage.

There's a face in one window, a relative? Culling's father, in a business suit with others around him nude, is in the foreground. Culling can identify them all, even the pleasant looking dog ambling by.

TWO PAINTINGS are partly of Florida. The artist cut a larger all-Florida painting in half because he didn't like it.

So now, Culling said, "The bottom's Michigan, top's Florida. My sister likes it and she hates everything I do."

The animals in the Florida painting are from the Detroit Zoo.

Culling, who studied with Robert Wilbert and John Egner at Wayne State University, works days in another trade, which he prefers not to publicize although it's a perfectly legitimate, respectable way to support himself. He paints evenings and weekends.

It is his unusual intellect which brings the strength to his work, his courage to combine the ridiculous and the sublime and come up with charm and challenge. He admits to a love of literature and a delight in reading, and this too has influenced his work, which is an unusual combination of intellectual and primitive.

Some of the paintings carry the quality of a fable. Others, based on Bible references, seem like icons, yet they are filled with anachronisms and, consequently, unexpected delights. The show continues through Feb. 5. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.

School offers variety of music for all ages

Detroit Community Music School/Cranbrook Branch is offering new programs for children and adults beginning Jan. 24. The location is Cranbrook Middle School, 1060 Vaughn, Bloomfield Hills.

A Children's Community Choir for singers second through eighth grades is now being formed. This will be a companion ensemble to the Detroit Children's Choir which sang with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in a holiday performance of the Nutcracker Suite.

"Introduction to Suzuki," a six-week course offering parents and children an opportunity to explore the Suzuki program begins the week of Jan. 24.

Parents who are interested are invited to attend an orientation meeting at 7 p.m. Monday. For reservations, call 831-2870.

A Saturday morning program, "Pre-Orchestra String Ensemble," will be given for young string players who

need development of reading and ensemble skills. Second through eighth grade students are eligible.

Chamber Music Workshops for older youth and adults will be held twice monthly from February through May.

Performers in the area will be available for coaching. Instrumentalists in strings or woodwinds may attend individually for placement in an ensemble or may attend as a group. Opportunities for performance will be offered under the auspices of Detroit Community Music School at the end of the workshop. Tuition cost for each person is \$5 a session for a total of six weeks.

A Jazz Improvisation Workshop will be taught by Kathy Cezar, oboe and flute. She is a former member of the Pastiche Quintet. The eight-week, evening course will introduce the wind player to the elements and techniques

of jazz improvisation. Tuition for the eight weeks is \$60.

Registration is also open for ongoing programs in group and private instruction at the Cranbrook Branch site.

For registration information, call Shirley Harden or Mary Burdine at Detroit Community Music School, 831-2870.

Women's group hears Gorsuch

Anne M. Gorsuch, who has had a fiery reign as administrator for the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), will be guest speaker at the Women's Economic Club luncheon meeting Friday, Jan. 14 in the Columbus Ballroom of the Westin Hotel in downtown Detroit.

Gorsuch, who was threatened with jail for contempt of Congress last month, will speak on "EPA in the '80s" at 11:45 a.m. For ticket information, call the Women's Economic Club office at 953-5088.

Reach out to shut-ins

Persons are confined to their homes who wish information on the Senior Adult Outreach Program may call 474-1407 for information.

The program is sponsored by Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Senior Adult Program. Outreach coordinator is Mary DiManno.

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