

# Creative Living

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## Fine detail nurtures grand sculptural plan

By Carol Azizian  
staff writer

The monumental qualities, dramatic shadows and sweeping movements that characterize Glen Michaels' massive murals are now apparent in his smaller works.

Admirers of Michaels' sculptures may see his recent works at the Rubiner Gallery, 7001 Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield. The exhibit opens Friday and continues through Dec. 6.

"This show demonstrates the result of years of effort in bringing some of the sweeping qualities — the feeling I get from nature and (convey) in my 10 or 40 or 60-foot murals — into my smaller works," the Troy artist explained.

Labeled a "Renaissance man" by his friends and fellow artists, Michaels is best known for his wall assemblages of domino-like tiles, stone, wood, cast bronze and printing press type.

Some of his monumental works adorn walls in Detroit Receiving Hospital, Oakwood Hospital in Dearborn, Michigan Bell executive offices, Macomb Community College Center for the Performing Arts and the Kresge Foundation in Troy. His most recent recognition is the Michigan Foundation for the Arts Award.

**TAILOR-MADE** for gallery exhibitions, his new works vary in size from a 48-inch circular bas relief to a 7-foot tall free-standing sculpture.

A square-shaped bas relief, reminiscent of his "Windscape" — a 17-by-14-foot wall relief commissioned for Detroit Receiving Hospital — gives an impression of gusts of wind or tidal waves. Dramatic contrasts between grey pieces of type from old printing presses, white porcelain and ebony tiles and polished brass rods heighten the effect.

As he points out minute details in the work, Michaels speaks almost romantically of "Chinese cloud formations" and tiny starbursts weaving in and out of the piece.

His love of nature and fascination with the past are revealed in the variety of motifs, all exactly combined to create patterns and designs.

In a 7-foot tall, free-standing sculpture, he incorporates interweaving elements of Celtic design, intertwining vines inspired by the Vikings and fan-like patterns reminiscent of Oriental design. The pieces are larger at the base of the sculpture and gradually become smaller as the viewer's eye

moves upward. The result is an illusion of tiles tumbling forward.

"The tiles build up tension and seem to fall away from the wall — as if they aren't governed by the rule of gravity," Michaels said.

Another distinguishing feature of the free-standing sculpture is its depth. In contrast to the two-inch depth of many of his earlier works, this relief extends eight inches.

The greater depth creates shadows. "Finding a logical way of building dramatic shadows into the work has been a subtle transition over the past 20 years," Michaels noted.

"In a couple of works I did for corporations in New York and other places, the impact of the shadows was lessened when the lights were turned on.

"These (recent) works have deep shadows and valleys already created within them."

A **SHIELD-LIKE** design, reminiscent of Renaissance brass, and tiles from a Greek ruin in Tripoli form parts of a circular relief.

Inspired by floats in the Japanese Gion festival, which commemorates the end of a plague in the 12th century, Michaels creates an interesting design atop yet another relief.

He varies the shapes of his reliefs along with the intricate patterns. There are two circles and two squares in the exhibit. The remainder are tall, rectangular shapes.

"While the tall, narrow shapes are satisfying architecturally, circles and squares radiate and fill much more space," Michaels said.

A free-flowing effect is created in all the works. Following the natural curves of the armature, he achieves a "bamboo look."

"The wood itself dictates the curve (that the tile pieces follow)," Michaels said. "This is a very positive direction for me. I'm not (confined) to a flat board."

Although the technique gives him a little more artistic freedom, it still requires discipline, he said.

Michaels continues to work on other commissions — a fireplace facade for Sonmi College in northern Michigan, a chapel piece for Detroit Receiving Hospital, several paintings and a few works for private collections.

He continually experiments with new forms. The changes are subtle, but apparent to the keen observer.

"I could get a lot of attention doing everything bright green or hard-edged," he mused. "But I work one step at a time and it opens new avenues."



The works, above and below, were made to be hung, but they are so heavy that it takes several people to lift them. In these, Michaels has transferred many of the details that typify his large scale works in buildings in the metropolitan area as well as around the country, to these smaller scale pieces for either private or corporate collections.



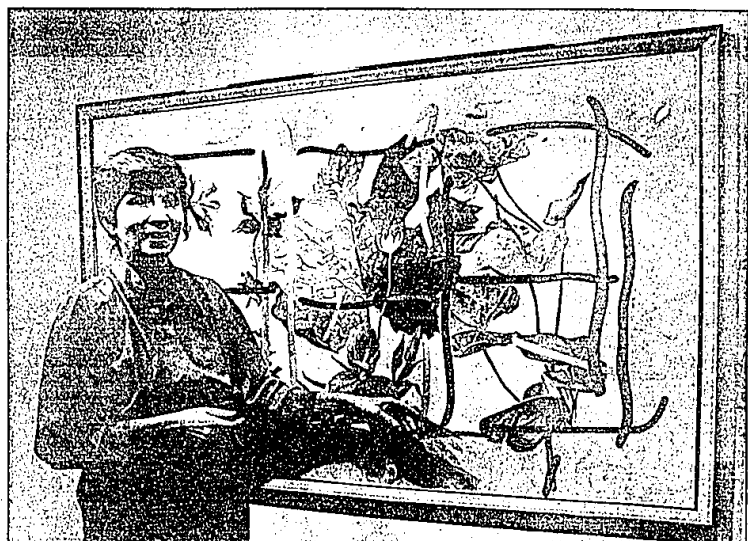
Staff photos by Mindy Saunders



Glen Michaels explains his approach to the free-standing sculpture. There's an element of anti-gravity optical illusion in the piece in which the sweep of movement appears to be upward. Each tile and bit of cast metal is put in place by the artist.

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## Trip to the Orient inspires painter



Electra Stamelos found great inspiration in the Orient and would like the Japanese people to see her work, for she is certain they would immediately understand all of the nuances and symbols.

By Carol Azizian  
staff writer

Inspired by a recent trip to China, Electra Stamelos has incorporated elements of Oriental design with her own distinctive brand of realism to create a series of radiant watercolors.

Scroll-shaped paintings with strokes of color reminiscent of Chinese calligraphy, fans and lotus blossoms represent a new direction for the veteran Detroit-area artist's work.

The watercolors will be exhibited through Saturday at the Cantor/Lemberg Gallery, 538 North Woodward, Birmingham.

While her previous works seemed to reach beyond realism and occasionally border on the surreal, these recent watercolors touch on abstraction.

"When I started this series, I did it as a relief from the tedium of detail (in her earlier works)," Stamelos explained. "But it pushed me into another direction."

She uses the same subject matter — leaves and flowers — and intensity of color that characterize her earlier works. But rather than pack many images tightly into the space, she selects a few dominant ones and scatters smaller variations around those.

In a 40-by-60-inch work entitled "Scrolls," she has painted a larger-than-life-sized leaf, surrounded by smaller leaves and wildflowers. Ribbons of color — similar to calligraphy — divide the work into three Chinese scrolls.

Fans, lotus blossoms and ferns provide Oriental touches in other watercolors.

The elements reflect her impressions of China's countryside and culture.

"It was a very inspiring trip," Stamelos recalled. "We traveled to six cities and the Chinese did a fantastic job of showing us around."

"The country looked lush. There wasn't a plot of ground anywhere that wasn't cultivated."

"When we toured a textile factory, I noticed they work with 2,000 colors. I said, that's my kind of people. They like colors."

Although she's not fond of some Chinese paintings, Stamelos admires the intricate handwork in Oriental embroidery and carpeting.

"They can take a really lousy painting and reinterpret it into carpeting or embroidery. It's gorgeous — a work of art."

"I'd love to send them one of my watercolors," she added. "I know they'd get all the little nuances."

AN INSTRUCTOR at the University of Michigan — Dearborn and the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, Stamelos has always been fascinated with color and photographic images.

She spends part of the year in Florida photographing the lush vegetation in an effort to provide realistic renditions of her subject matter.

"I always thought I was doing realism and getting more photographic," she mused. "But one day, I was talking to Tom Boone (one of the owners of the Habatat Gallery in Lathrup Village) and he said my paintings were beyond realism."

**Cantor/Lemberg Gallery with a show of works by Electra Stamelos as well as Aris Koutroulis and Mel Rosas is one of 21 galleries on this Sunday's tour sponsored by Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association. The 2-5 p.m. tour will be followed by a 5:30 p.m. supper at the art center. For ticket information, call 644-0866.**