

Softworks

Fastidiously fashioned figures of the dream and fantasy world

By Loraine McEllish
staff writer

One of the standouts in Birmingham Temple's Art Show this month is sure to be a display of life-sized soft sculptures set in unconventional poses created by Kathy Lathers.

The artist calls her picturesque figures "Softworks" and says they were all fashioned "to release the child inside in you and me — to bring out the dream and fantasy world."

By showtime she'll have about a half-dozen 5-6-foot tall exquisitely dressed imageries and another 20 smaller pieces ready for exhibit. But if tradition holds she'll be sold out before closing time.

"The temple show has always been one of my favorites but I never seem to be able to get far enough ahead of myself to be able to stay the whole three days," she said.

Lathers' softworks were a sellout on the first show she ever prepared for, about 10 years ago. The same has held true right up until the last time she showed her work late this summer during a benefit for Common Ground in Birmingham's Shain Park.

But the Farmington Hills resident and her fantasy figures will be among 80 artists at the show's preview to meet guests 8-11 p.m. Friday, Nov. 15, in the temple, 28011 12 Mile. Wine and cheese is included in the \$3 admission.

The show continues from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday and from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. Admission for these days is \$1.

The event is the temple's 11th invitational art show, which includes the works of painters, sculptors, those who create jewelry, ceramics, glassworks, weaving, metal art and basketry.

"THE MATERIALS Lathers uses to drape and dress her softworks are so unusual, so out-of-the-way, that one cannot help but ask where she finds them."

"I'm a scavenger. No matter what I'm doing at the time one eye is always on the search. Look at this," she said, pointing to fastidiously marked shelves in her home studio of handmade weavings, little-seen fabrics, crocheted pieces, unfamiliar jewelry and buttons.

"If I find a hat or a collar or a scarf in an antique shop I can use it, more than likely will go on some figure right away. Those things don't sit around here." Her sunlit, shelf-lined studio is filled with a sewing machine and a dozen figures in various phases of completion.

All of her fantasy figures are made with soft bodies with insertions that give them strength so they can stand, sit or be twisted into just about any human pose.

And all of them take on a character drawn from legend, from myth, from folk tales, a variation on one of these themes, maybe her own dreams, or someone else's dream or fantasy they have shared with the artist.

The figures are all given names, such as "The Mender of Broken Hearts" or "The Spirit of Laughter" or "The Sand-woman."

"But different people see them differently. When they find another home I know they take on different poses and different meanings so of course they get different names," she said.

LATHERS STUDIED art at Grand Valley State College, starting out as a ceramist "because I was lured only to the three dimensional," she said. "I think art should be touched."

Along the way she created clothing, now known as wearable art, learned and studied many forms of still life, and then turned to dollmaking. Many of her earlier dolls assume poses caught in mid-motion, much the same as her later works with names such as "Dream Sweeps" and "Spirit of Flight."

Carri Lathers twists "Midnight Masquerade" into shape on the display stand. The fifth-grader at Gill Elementary School has seen together many of the figures' bodies.

Her acrobatic jesters have given way to story people, each telling its own tale. A something-new for her is pyramids of mythical figures, animals and elves, who interact with one another.

One of the pyramids that will be seen in the Birmingham Temple show is a group of three figures leap frogging. As creatively expands and the concepts become more complex, one of her aspirations is to create a configuration with as many as a dozen figures interacting.

That will happen "whenever I can get the time," she said. "I'm booked through December, now and have promised a half-dozen pieces for an exhibit in Chicago I'm not even going to be able to attend."

Carri Lathers, a fifth grader in Gill Elementary School, is her mother's ba-

sic seamstress and already a dollmaker in her own right.

Carri is unable to even guess how many cloth bodies she has sewn together following her mother's patterns that run from 12-inches to 6-feet long in preparation for her mother to fill, dress, decorate and turn them into fantasy characters.

"Though most of her characters come from her own imagination or her dreams, she singles out 'The Wizard' to tell of a figure she created as a private commission. When her client came to share her story of 'The Wizard' she brought with her sumptuous fabrics and accessories that had belonged to her grandmother."

"That was a neat kind of magic — when someone else sets you loose with her own thing," she said.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Kathy Lathers, who says she is addicted to dolls, poses with two of her life-size fantasy figures that are ready for Birmingham Temple's Art Show Nov. 15-17. All of her figures are made so they can be twisted into a variety of positions.

'L'Affaire de la Femme' benefits March of Dimes

Makeover artist GaNeene will headline "L'Affaire de la Femme" a luncheon benefiting March of Dimes fight against birth defects scheduled for noon Saturday, Nov. 16 in Restaurant Duginas, Southfield Road, north of 12 Mile.

educational programs and community service projects.

GaNeene is fashion coordinator for Weight Watchers. She also does private consultations and will share fashion insights during the event. An added attraction is a display of jewelry from Roman Jewelry.

A complete makeover will be the focal point of GaNeene's demonstration. Tickets to the event cost \$18. Proceeds help the March of Dimes fight birth defects via medical research, ed-

Because space is limited to 150 persons, Georgia Olsen urges interested people to make reservations by Thursday, Nov. 14 at 400-3307.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

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The staff of Harrison High School's year book has put out a call for rummage of all kinds to be sold in the school Saturday, Nov. 9. Persons wishing to contribute to the fund-raiser are asked to call David Carr, 474-8916, or

Stephanie Manwaring, 477-4139. Sale hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. in the lobby of the school auditorium on 12 Mile between Middlebelt and Orchard Lake Road.

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