

'Grandma' rubbed off on Will Moses

By Victoria Diaz
special writer

THE "CANVAS" is a piece of masonite 14-by-21 inches. The subject is a 19th-century traveling circus, set up in a New England meadow. Colors are kaleidoscopic, bright and intense. The style is simple, straightforward, almost child-like. Though just a bit more detailed, a shade more complex, it is strikingly reminiscent of the work of American

ca's most-famous primitivist, Anna Mary Robertson Moses or, as she was popularly known, "Grandma Moses."

In fact, "Circus in a Meadow" is a Moses painting. But it wasn't done by the legendary New England artist who first won acclaim for her work in the 1940s, when she was over 80.

Instead it's the work of her great-grandson, Will Moses, a tall, amiable 30-year-old, whose plain-spokenness would do any New Englander proud.

"THERE'S NO hidden message in anything I paint," said Moses, in Southfield recently at The Print Gallery to kick off an exhibit of his newest works. "There's nothing hard to understand. After you buy one of my paintings, you don't have to have an expert come and tell you what you've bought. What you see is what you get, and that's really all there is to it. You either like it, or you don't."

Like his great-grandmother, Moses is largely self-taught. "I paint.

I paint some more. Then I paint some more," he said. "With me, it's just a matter of learning by doing. I've never studied art in any formal way, and I've never taught it. I always hated school. Too headstrong, I guess."

MOSES BEGAN his art education in his grandfather's studio at the family home in upstate New York, where Grandma Moses did many of her famous paintings, and where Will Moses lives and works today. "My grandfather, Forrest Moses, was also a professional painter and, especially in the winter time, my cousins and I would go to his studio where he'd give us some paints to work with and a board to paint on, and encourage us to paint. I was about 4, I think, when I started doing that."

"We painted in the style he painted in, because that's what we had as an example. And his style was very similar to his mother's."

"I suppose you can call it primitive art, naive art, folk art, if you want to put a label on it. It falls in there, somewhere probably. But I don't really know how to describe it. Put it this way: You'll know it when you see it. There's just sort of that 'look' to it."

His grandfather gave Will Moses a start in painting in more ways than one, actually.

When Will was around 12, Forrest Moses began including one of grandson's paintings in the sale each time he sold a painting of his own. It acquainted art collectors with the work of young Will and helped to open some doors in the art world when he began making the rounds a few years later, shortly after his high school graduation.

HIS FIRST SHOW was at a small gallery in Ramo, N.Y., when he was 19, and he's been painting professionally ever since, supporting himself and his family solely through his art. A good deal of his success he attributes to the consistent appeal of the easy-to-comprehend, easy-to-enjoy Moses style.

He claims he's never seriously entertained thoughts of working in any other style. Simply put, he says, the reasons for that have been largely monetary.

"I have a mortgage, a family and bills to pay, just like everybody else," he said. "When I first started

out, I knew that I had a choice of living in a cold-water flat somewhere or living like normal people."

"I didn't want to be a starving artist, living in a cold-water flat — that just never appealed to me in the least. So I knew when I started out with this, that if I didn't make it, I'd go on to something else. But I was going to give this my very best shot. And that's what I did."

So far it's working out rather nicely. Today the original paintings of Will Moses go for anywhere from \$225-\$5,000, with limited edition lithographs at around \$100 each. His work hangs in the White House and the State of New York Museum, is included in private and corporate collections in the U.S., Canada, Europe and the Middle East, and is also a part of the permanent collection at the Smithsonian Institute.

All of his paintings depict the area near the Vermont border where Will Moses grew up (known to many now as "Moses Country"), with its gently rolling foothills, traditional white farmhouses, and colorful red barns.

MOSES DOES NOT paint contemporary scenes. "I try to reflect times that have gone by," he says, "simpler times, happier times. I paint largely by imagining things, not looking at things."

"Lots of times, a subject of a painting will be an idea that somebody has given me. Other times, I might amass a lot of old postcards, or photographs and articles from old newspapers and go on from there."

Titles beneath the paintings on display at The Print Gallery suggest the kinds of scenes Moses favors: "Skaters' Moon," "Wintertime Farm," "Airing the Quills," "Pigs on the Loose," "Older Mill," "Sugar Bush" and "Catch the Christmas Turkey."

It's no coincidence that some of Moses' work is a bit reminiscent of Currier & Ives wintertime scenes. His favorite artist, he says, is a little-known American painter named George Durrie. Nicknamed, "The Snowman," Durrie was a master of the winter scenes produced by the world-famous lithographing firm.

When he's not painting, Moses and his wife, Sharon, work at restoring the family farmhouse, and have recently begun trying their hand at raising Scotch Highland cattle.

A "gentleman farmer," Moses is quick to point out that "the painting supports the cattle-raising," not the other way around. The couple are also kept busy with new son, Jerry, and are working to convert a barn out back of the farmhouse into a new studio for Moses who has, up until now, worked in the sunroom of the 175-year-old family home.

WHAT' IN THE future for Will Moses?

"My primary goal right now is to get that barn finished and converted to a studio. As far as the painting goes, I really don't know where it's going to take me. My goal all along has been to make a living at this thing I do. It's still my goal."

"The appeal of Will Moses' paintings lies largely with the kinds of scenes he paints," said Diane Takekian of The Print Gallery. "He shows us a happier time in American life. Nothing is hurried, and from our hurried pace, it's almost like we can step into these scenes and relax. Also, he shows us real places — places he's familiar with inside and out, because he has his basic roots there."

The Will Moses exhibit will continue at The Print Gallery, 29203 Northwestern Highway, through mid-December.

'There's no hidden message in anything I paint . . . After you buy one of my paintings, you don't have to have an expert come and tell you what you've bought.'

— Will Moses



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Artist Will Moses poses with two of his pictures: at the top, "Wandering Cows" and "Slaughtering Hogs."



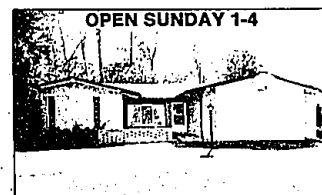
LAKEFRONT CONTEMPORARY

This home was featured in BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS magazine and is located on HOLLY LAKE in Farmington Hills. This award-winning offers 4,000 sq. ft. of luxury and features a ONE OF A KIND master bedroom suite. Must be seen to be appreciated. Call Today! \$198,000 (PR390) 557-6700



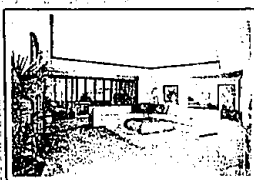
MAGNIFICENT 1912 ESTATE

This expansive 4500 sq. ft. quality built home features, beamed ceiling living room, formal dining room with built-in china cabinet, five bedrooms, 3 full plus 1/2 bath, newly decorated with numerous improvements. \$159,000 (R30) 547-2000



OPEN SUNDAY 1-4

19961 CHERRY HILL - SOUTHFIELD
South of 15 Mile/East of Evergreen. LAND CONTRACT TERMS!! Custom built ranch WITH ALL THE EXTRAS! Large family room with fireplace, central air, dining room, beautiful rec room, attached garage and circle drive. BRING OFFERS!! \$105,000 (C15-199) 557-6700

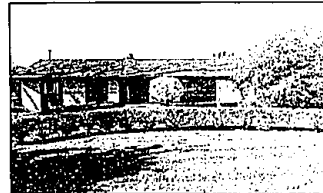


Glen Oaks. The only one of its kind. Quite simply in expressing elegance, quality and prestige Glen Oaks has no equal. Glen Oaks. An exclusive private community nestled in 10 naturally landscaped acres, complimented by a lake, stream and ponds. Built to accommodate the most discerning eye and discriminating taste. It stands unrivaled. Nothing was spared or omitted. Like the helicopter landing pad and all grounds security - virtually impenetrable to the uninvited. Yes, within minutes from your doorstep, is Twelve Oaks Mall - with more than 130 stores, restaurants, and theatres - for your convenience and enjoyment.

If you aspire to live in an environment offering the very best - make your address Glen Oaks, and seek refuge in this oasis of luxury.

43100 Twelve Oaks Crescent
(Across from Twelve Oaks Mall)
Hours: Sat. & Sun. 11-5 p.m.
or by appointment

851-2303



SOUTHFIELD

Sunning contemporary 4 bedroom brick ranch, 3 1/2 baths, unique gourmet kitchen, spacious family room with complimentary built-in, professionally decorated, lovely window treatments and magnificent landscaping. \$172,500 (D-295) 851-2303



FARMINGTON HILLS CONDO

Location, convenience, price and style...the perfect blend for a great lifestyle. This 2 bedroom, 2 bath ground level unit end unit has a walk-out to a lovely courtyard, central tones, tennis court, pool and much more. \$74,900 (F-305) 851-2303



BEVERLY HILLS CHARMING

3 bedroom brick ranch, 2 baths, updated kitchen. Fantastic rec room with 4th bedroom on lower level. 2 1/2 car garage. Deck, nicely landscaped lawn. Superb area. Move-in condition. \$115,000 (L-165) 540-6777

SOUTHFIELD/LATHRUP
557-6700

ROYAL OAK
547-2000

Chamberlain
REALTORS®

WEST BLOOMFIELD
851-2303

BLOOMFIELD
644-6788

BIRMINGHAM
540-6777

ROCHESTER
651-3330

TROY
643-8500



"Serving the area's finest communities since 1918"