

The art community was special concern

By Corinne Abelt
staff writer

Mary Beard's death from cancer last week leaves the metropolitan art community minus one of its strongest member/supporters. As an artist, she liked to call herself an "experimenter."

Putting it another way, she liked to move well ahead of the crowd, to work new materials with new processes or if she used traditional paint and canvas, to deal with subjects on the outer reach of time and space.

She studied art at Center for Creative Studies when it was known as Society of Arts and Crafts and later at Cranbrook Academy of Art. In the 50s she was a member of the Hylzlist group of artists whose art happened at the gothic dome at Northland Center shook up the sensibilities of die-hard traditionalists.

As Mary talked about that in one of about five interviews I did with her, she smiled and said, "We shocked everybody when a guy in a string jumped out of a box all painted and we released a bunch of chickens in the dome."

When she was director of exhibitions at the Pontiac Art Center, she just assumed I would want to cover her trip to Jackson Prison to pick out paintings for a show of prison art.

My daughter, Cynthia, went along as our photographer and Mary led her little parade of people in through gates and clanging prison doors as if she had a Brownie troop on nature hike.

SHE LIKED to plan exhibits and she did it well, but she was also doing the woman-artist balancing act — tending to family responsibilities and trying to find time for her own career as an artist. And she was always supportive of other artists.

When I went to her Pontiac studio to look at some of the paintings in her "Speed Series" early

In 1979, she wanted me to also pop into the studios of several struggling, young artists in the same building, just to give them some encouragement. The "Speed Series" opened at the Cornell Club of New York City that April.

She had long been interested in outer space both physically and artistically. The abstract images which she did on Mylar panels through a photo chemical process related to that.

She showed these at the Ward-Nesse Gallery of New York City in the late 70s. She liked them as a total installation rather than as individual works of art, saying, "To me, they are like doors going to other worlds."

BY THE EARLY '80s, Mary was looking toward the stars. Her series "Think Space," was exhibited at University of Michigan and Midland Center for the Arts and a number of the paintings went into corporate collections and public buildings such as the Renaissance Center, the Kresge Eye Center and City National Bank of Detroit.

When an exhibition of her paintings on space toured from one space center to another around the country, it was another first and she loved it.

She liked to keep her roles as wife, mother and grandmother separate from her career as artist and art impresario. The last major exhibit she planned was "Immortalization," a show of work by Center for Creative Studies alumni that opened in 1986 at Detroit Historical Museum. Proceeds from the posh opening night party went to the school.

Looking at Mary with her curly gray hair, ready smile, often mod, colorful outfits that were as much costume as clothes, it was easy to forget that she thought in grandiose dimensions and on a monumental scale. She didn't age. She grew. She didn't just live — she created, she shared, she inspired.

Concert reinforces faith in future of modern music

By Avigdor Zoromp
special writer

Few symphony orchestra programs feature exclusively 20th-century music. However, one such program was presented by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra a few weeks ago, featuring works by Stravinsky and Shostakovich and another was given last week.

The two major works on the latter were the Piano Concerto No. 2 by Bartok and the Symphony No. 5 by Prokofiev. The program opened with a less familiar work — "Dream Waltzes" by the American composer Steven Stucky (b. 1949).

Guest conductor David Zinman has traditionally enjoyed a close rapport with the musicians as well as with the audience in his other visits here.

This time there was an added dimension to his ties here. As music director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Zinman was instrumental in

helping that orchestra reach financial health following a 16-week walkout, an experience that is relevant to our own situation.

PROGRAMS FEATURING 20th-century music can be appealing if the works are well-written and the performers are up to the task. The quality requirement was definitely fulfilled in the two major works.

Opinions on the Stucky work may differ, but I didn't find it particularly appealing. Among its more attractive elements were brief quotations from Brahms and Richard Strauss, which tend to underscore the feeling that the work has little original merit.

Bartok's Piano Concerto No. 2 isn't universally embraced. But the treasures of this work are acknowledged by most of those with musical back-

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