

Creative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300



(F)E

Thursday, August 4, 1988 O&E

Brass rubbings bring history to life

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

SINCE HE FIRST became interested in brass rubbing in 1965, Rochester Hills art teacher Julius Kusey has spent a good many summers on his knees. He finds his subject matter on the floors of historic cathedrals and little out-of-the-way churches in rural England.

His most comprehensive exhibition so far is on display at the County Galleria through Sept. 15. Not only do his rubbings show his not-too-shabby skill in this unusual art form, they present a direct and surprisingly intimate view of life in 13th, 14th, 15th century England.

The big ones, all the size of a grave, were done from brasses which Kusey said, "Mark a tomb in a church where someone was buried or were placed in the church floor as a commemorative spot."

The commemorative brasses, which he likened to memorial windows in a church, increased as burial in churchyards became common.

He said, "The first brasses were done in Flanders and Germany. England has the best preserved collection and they're doing something to preserve them. . . . Wales has a few, Ireland has a few." He said that, in all, England has about 5,000 brasses and there are often waiting lines to do some of the most popular such as the one done in 1289 of Sir Roger Trumpington of Trumpington, Cambridgeshire. He is dressed in full battle regalia with chain mail. His legs are crossed symbolizing he died in battle.

KUSEY SAID the English are getting more and more strict about the use of the brasses. He always gets a permit from the church vicer or person in charge of the cathedral before he starts and sometimes writes ahead to be sure he can go ahead. There is always a charge or donation, the equivalent of between \$5-10.

He said, "The brasses do not even resemble the people they are commemorating — they're just stylized. They represent shopkeepers, knights and ladies, clergy, merchants."

He was standing beside a rubbing done in 1378 of Sir John Foxley from Bray, Berkshire who had a woman on each side of him. "They are wives, one and two. A man will very often have all of his wives with him. I have seen them with three and four. Many times they are accompanied by children. In Gloucester (where sheep are raised) the wool merchants are often standing on a pack of wool."

Around the heads of the soldiers it was common to show a kind of loose design representing the detail of the helmet. "It is out of proportion and out of perspective," said Kusey. "There are often the family crests of the lady and the man."

He said he carries a roll of paper and works with a "heelball," a special hard, wax crayon. While black crayon on white paper is considered by purists to be the most desirable, Kusey also does rubbings with metallic crayons, gold, copper and silver, sometimes on black paper.

He said, "I do what I like to do. . . . It's amazing to see the different quality of rubbings." He said he may erase a few fingerprints, but that's all he does once he has finished his work. Kusey said there is no evidence of signatures on any of them. "Either they preferred not to sign or they didn't know enough to."



Sir Roger Trumpington of Trumpington, Cambridgeshire, died in battle. The crossed legs are the symbol for that. The brass is dated 1289. The definition of the chain mail and battle paraphernalia in the full size rubbing is quite extraordinary.

complete a major rubbing. Many are in remote locations and lots of them are covered by a carpet to protect them from wear and tear. And even if they were easy to find and see, the detail on the original metal piece isn't as easy to discern as it is on the rubbing.

The lovely designs of the women's clothing, details of the armor and on the shields, the beautiful forms of the animals — lions symbolize courage, dogs fidelity — the hair and the head-dress styles pop out as clearly as if they were done yesterday.

Kusey said his printmaking major has been



Julius Kusey says he has spent every summer since 1965 on his knees, "if you're not praying, you're rubbing." Just before his show opened at the County Galleria, he was off his knees and on the ladder to

check his rubbing of Sir Thomas Massyngberd, 1405, done in Cunby Hall Church, Cunby, Lincolnshire.



helpful to him. He's comfortable with this medium. He's spent more than 20 summers pursuing his passion and this summer will be no different. He'll be going to England to do some more, possibly not as many as in those early years, but the interest is still strong.

The County Galleria in the Executive Office Building, Oakland County Complex, 1200 N. Telegraph, is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday. Tours with Kusey talking about his work and his experiences may be arranged by calling the Cultural Affairs office, 858-0415.



Staff photos by Jerry Zolynsky

IT TAKES AT LEAST six hours on the knees to

Gift brightens sanctuary

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

All during the three months Suzanne Velick was painting her gift for Birmingham Temple of Farmington, she worried about it. Would the members like it? Would Rabbi Sherwin Wine like it? After all, it was to commemorate his 60th birthday as well as the temple's 25th anniversary. And would she, the artist, like it?

Only one or two people knew she was making the four 6 1/2 by 4 foot paintings, acrylic on canvas on a hard backing. Each panel represents a season with symbols relating to the Jewish holidays in it as well as symbols relating to the temple.

The Velicks are one of the eight families who founded the temple. Her husband, Harry, was the first president and she was the first secretary.

"We have a lot invested in it emotionally and we have a lot of ties here. Now," she said looking at her art work in the back of the sanctuary, "I've left something of myself here."

Although Velick paints and sells large abstracts as well as figurative works, she chose to use strong, almost folk art type imagery for these. She's familiar with this style because she collects folk art as well as American primitives. She said she consciously avoided making her panels look like the biblical paintings of the great Marc Chagall's whom she admires, but didn't want to imitate.

"I like subject matter and I like things. I'm presently doing a series of large interiors. I love interiors and I love interior design."

— Suzanne Velick

"I LIKE SUBJECT MATTER and I like things. I'm presently doing a series of large interiors. I love interiors and I love interior design." Then she went back to talking about the panels, she said, "Everything, first of all, is out of my head. The only thing I had a model for is my own Seder plate. There are buildings all across the top of the panels. . . . what I thought the buildings of old Palestine would have looked like."

In the center of the spring panel is the scroll of Esther called the Megillah, which is read at Purim, celebrated in early spring.

Velick said, "I don't know how to read or write Hebrew, so I Xeroxed pages from our manuscript from the temple and collaged it onto the canvas."

On that same panel are the glasses for the wine, grapes from which the wine is made, spring blossoms such as apple and dogwood and many birds.

"This was fun to do," she said, "but, I agonized over it terribly. I worked on it non-stop every day for months and Harry (her husband) would come into the studio and say 'keep going, I love it.' But, I had funny feelings about it."

She said she did it because she got tired of sitting in the sanctuary looking at the four walls with nothing on them and saying to herself that they needed something visual, something with color.

The summer panel contains symbols relating to Israel. "In summer we always seem to have our trips to Israel." In the lower left corner is the symbol of the Society for Humanistic Judaism and in the center the words of a song which is sung at almost every service in the temple.

"There's no mystery here. I don't do things like that," she said.

The shofar, or ram's horn, whose eerie sound is a part of the celebration of the High Holy Days of September and October, is pictured in the fall panel. World Day, another fall celebration at Birmingham Temple, is symbolized by a group of human figures of all colors. Sukkot, the festival of fulfillment which comes at harvest time, is represented by the plate of fruit.

THE WINTER PANEL, which she did first (because that was the time she started the project) is impressively anchored by the Lion of Judah symbolizing the miraculous victory of the Maccabean war. Pictured also are symbols of Hanukkah, the eight-day festival of lights — the menorah or candelabra and the dreidel or spinning top used for a children's game. The Hebrew letters in the upper right corner are those on the dreidel.

In fact, Velick said that even though she doesn't "speak" Hebrew letters, she liked using them

because the forms are so graphic and beautiful. She said there is a lot of food shown because food is such an important part of Jewish holidays.

There are birds on all the panels simply because she loves birds, "even raucous bluejays have a character that's unique." They are also symbols of peace and tranquility, she said.

She is pleased that the reaction has been resoundingly positive. The panels, hinged together in two parts, are movable and easily portable. Most of all they are filled with appealing, colorful, readily identifiable images which create an immediate feeling of well-being and pride in a rich historical and religious background.

Velick layered her paint to such an extent and applied a gloss finish to the surface, so they actually look like oil paintings.

She said she likes them now more than she did at first, "I was in charge. I got to pick what went into it. This was mine. That's the nice thing about art. No matter who buys it or where it goes, it's still yours."

As a surprise birthday gift for his artist wife, Harry Velick had Dirk Bakker take color photos of the panels and had them mounted and hinged exactly like the original. These, 5-by-10-inches each, drew so much comment, Velick said they may have more made up to be sold for a benefit for the temple.

Velick's paintings are shown at Home and Gallery of Farmington Hills and Lee McKinley Gallery of Grand Rapids.



NANCY BONST/Staff photographer

Suzanne Velick said she likes her four-panel painting which she made as a gift for Birmingham Temple of Farmington Hills better now than when she was doing it. She chose to do it with unusually strong imagery and lots of color.