

Creative Living

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Artist wins National Parks award

By Corinne Abait
staff writer

RITA MACH SKOCZEN, Rochester Hills painter, said she was "in total shock" when she heard her name called at a banquet at Jackson Lake Lodge (Wyo.) last month.

She had won the \$100,000 grand prize in the Art for the Parks competition. Her painting was chosen from a field of 2,850 from all parts of the country as the best in depicting the essence and diversity of the National Park System.

"I didn't know anything when we (she and her husband, Gene) went there. It was totally a secret. All I knew was that I was one of a hundred finalists," she said, adding that she considered herself very fortunate to have made it that far.

"I really thought the winner would be a park-type situation."

HER ACRYLIC painting, "Remembrance," showing a section of the Vietnam War Memorial with a single rose laid across it, is a decided departure from the expected herd of moose, single bald eagle soaring or big horned sheep against a mountain skyline. However, all of the judges said the impact of Skoczen's painting was overwhelming.

"I went to see the Memorial in Washington, D.C., three years ago," she said. "I was very interested in seeing it. Being a traditionalist, I wasn't sure I'd like it, but it had such an impact on me that I knew I was going to do something on it. I think it's the greatest memorial ever built."

Skoczen said she had several ideas for paintings, and threw all but the simplest out, sensing immedi-



Rita Mach Skoczen knew she had to do this painting as soon as she visited the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C.

ately that it was the one she must use.

"SELF-DETERMINED AND self-taught," Skoczen describes herself as "a very determined artist," more so possibly because her mother didn't believe in art education, so she only managed to study art for about a year and a half. Art has been an important part of her life since she was a child.

Skoczen, a realist, is perhaps best known in this area for her portraits, several of which were in a show at the Paint Creek Art Center earlier this year.

Her versatility, however, showed up when her painting of flowers won first prize in the 1985 Arts and Flowers competition at the Detroit Institute of Arts. She is a member of the Birmingham Society of Women Painters and is often represented in regional juried shows.



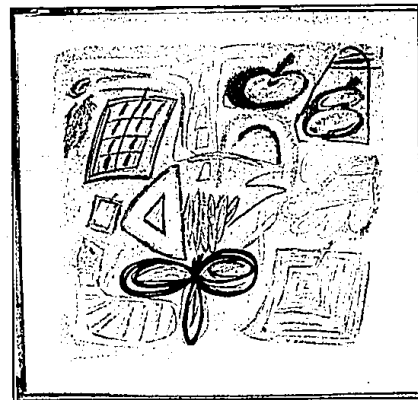
DUANE BURLESON/staff photographer

While she is known for her portraits, Rita Skoczen paints other subjects as well — and very successfully as evidenced by her national award.

Skoczen hasn't given much thought to what she will do with the money, she said. Right now she is enjoying the wonder and excitement of being a winner in the first national competition she ever entered.

This Arts for the Parks contest, now in its second year, is the largest representational art contest in the world. The contest and the art works generated from the contest raise money for the maintenance and preservation of national parks.

Last year's winner was Richard Schmid of Evanston, Ill., whose painting was titled, "Mountain Stream."



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Ida Hohmeyer floats her fanciful symbols on a rich painterly ground that may vary from soft pastel to vibrant oranges and purples.

Fanciful imagery to savor

By Corinne Abait
staff writer

Ida Hohmeyer's art will make you smile. Guaranteed. Not a flat, complacent, bored smile, but one that starts from within and makes your whole face just kind of... relax.

Now in her early 70s, Hohmeyer is a veritable institution in her hometown of New Orleans. But her art travels far beyond that — to museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, galleries, major corporate collections and just now to Robert Kidd Gallery of Birmingham.

"I've been trying to get her to have a show here for four or five years," said Ray Fleming, director, "but she never had any work available. Then, a while back when I talked to her, she said, 'Well, I do have seven paintings,' and I said, 'That's all I need.'"

The show of these plus some sculptures that are really an extension of her acrylics on canvas opens at Kidd Gallery tomorrow with a reception from 6-8 p.m., open to the public.

And while the attractive artist — who Fleming said sounds like a 30-year-old on the phone — may spend a great part of her non-painting time in her rose garden, she's far from your average garden-variety painter. She has a highly individual vision that allows her to refine symbols, ideas

and concepts into an almost childlike expression.

IMAGES SEEM to float on her canvasses like those things that appear when you awaken from a quick, sound sleep — jagged arrows, pink and blue clouds, triangles with receding centers, vortices and vaguely familiar outlines.

She has an alphabet of shapes and symbols that she keeps modifying and reusing. What could be a strawberry is roughly square in one painting, and may be rounded off in the next or elongated in still another.

Where a decade or so back she slotted each image into a place in a grid formation, these days she lets them float without structural confines, although they still seem to know their place. But they are far more free to arrange and rearrange themselves like organisms on a slide under a microscope.

Whether it is the influence of the colors of the roses in her garden or an inborn sense of color, Hohmeyer mixes rich, sensual backgrounds on which to place her cast of innate characters.

WHILE SHE grew up in affluent surroundings and excelled in just about everything she tried at Newcomb College, she wasn't content to remain a dilettante for long.

While raising a family, she completed her mas-

Whether it is the influence of the colors of the roses in her garden or an inborn sense of color, Hohmeyer mixes rich, sensual backgrounds on which to place her cast of innate characters.

ter's in art at Tulane and later went to Provincetown, Mass., to study with Hans Hofmann. She came under Mark Rothko's spell when he came to Newcomb in the late '50s.

In 1962 she was invited to do a sculpture for the New Orleans Central Business District. The result, "The Krewes of Poydras," five brightly painted, welded-steel sculptures, has given a new dimension and strong identification to the entire area.

Her paintings and sculpture will continue at Kidd Gallery through Nov. 5. Hours are 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.

Texas soprano surprised to be in 'Baby Doe'

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

When soprano Cheryl Parrish sang Sophie in "Der Rosenkavalier" with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa at the San Francisco Opera in 1983, her manager called to ask her to sing with Luciano Pavarotti in a special "Live from Lincoln Center" broadcast.

"I thought he was joking," she said at the Michigan Opera Theatre's Detroit offices. "I think it was then that my parents finally caught on — maybe I was serious about this."

Parrish is in town for rehearsals of "Ballad of Baby Doe," which opens at the Fisher Theatre Friday.

HER CASUAL manner contrasts with her meticulous appearance. Fresh from doing "Naughty Marietta" in New York this month, she is now completely absorbed in this role, one she has never sung.

"I can't believe they really hired me to sing this thing," she said in a soft Texas drawl.

(Baby Doe), who was, by 19th century Colorado terms, a ravishing beauty.

"She wasn't beautiful by today's standards," said Parrish, who has been reading the firsthand accounts about Baby Doe. "She was reddish blond and very chunky with mystical blue eyes that penetrated everyone she looked at."

THE SCANDALOUS, turn-of-the-century story of Baby Doe and her lover/husband Horace Tabor is a legend out of the real West. It is told by American composer Douglas Moore in this opera, which premiered in Central City, the site of Baby Doe's first mine.

When her husband, Harvey Doe, left her by jumping a train, Baby Doe was forced to make her own way and went to Leadville, where she met Tabor. The opera picks up the action at this point and takes the story on through Tabor's death.

"When the opera premiered in 1958, there were rumors that Baby Doe's daughter, Elizabeth, showed up at the opera incognito," Parrish said. "But no one knows for sure."

Her casual manner contrasts with her meticulous appearance. Fresh from doing "Naughty Marietta" in New York this month, she is now completely absorbed in this role, one she has never sung.

TABOR SHOCKED Denver and Washington society when he divorced his wife, Augusta, and married Baby Doe. Their fortune lasted until the economic collapse of 1893.

William Jennings Bryan took up the cause of the Colorado silver miners, the issue of free coinage of silver, in his "Cross of Gold" speech in 1896, but lost the election. With his defeat, Tabor's wealth ended.

In the opera, Baby Doe is frightened to have Tabor walk the streets of Leadville," Parrish said. "He was worth \$23 million at the time of the opera. She was afraid he would be

killed by one of the miners. In Leadville they had random shootings."

The authenticity of the opera's story also is shown by the reference to the Cornish people, who were brought to mine camps all over America for their skill in mapping mines.

"BABY DOE's family was also wealthy, but had been wiped out twice by fire," Parrish said. "They were Irish immigrants who settled in Oshkosh, Wis. She married the son of the town's mayor who gave them the Colorado mine for a wedding

gift. At 22, she was pregnant and yet she worked the Central City mine."

Baby Doe's life ended in tragedy. She was never able to get support to start up the Matchless Mine in Leadville after Tabor's death. She lived in abject poverty there and froze to death in 1935.

"This is the story of what happens when two underdogs get together," Parrish said. "But Baby Doe is not a spineless woman. Even though she was always the object of scorn she remained true to her husband's memory to the end of her life."

THE ROLE of Baby Doe is challenging in acting and vocal prowess. It features five exquisite soprano arias — the Willow, the Letter and the Silver arias, a duet with her mother, and a final aria, "Always through the Changing."

"The arias are written in the upper ranges, up to a high D, and Moore keeps you up there," Parrish said.

In July 1988, Opera News cited Parrish as one artist to "keep your eye on." The daughter of a Baptist minister who once toured the world



Cheryl Parrish

with a rock gospel group, she is too absorbed by the Baby Doe story even to mention it.

"I wonder if I could get out to Colorado this year to visit the Tabor Opera House or the Matchless Mine," she said. "How deep is the snow out there in December?"