

Creative Living



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Cranbrook To Mexico

Translating lasting impressions to fiber art

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

The positive repercussions from a trip to Mexico made by Gerard Knodel, head of the Cranbrook Academy of Art fiber department, and 18 of his students continue to surface.

In one week in December 1987, each of the graduate level students absorbed enough of the culture — celebrations, decoration and design, customs, costumes, architecture and color — to create a major work of art. Many of these are in the show, "Face to Face: Cranbrook to Mexico" at the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum through Feb. 3.

Some of the artists, such as Akemi Nakano, will continue doing work inspired by the trip. Her piece, triggered by the black and white cutouts she saw there, may be the beginning of an exciting, innovative series. Elizabeth P. Billings' magnificent "Wall of Ancestors," an eight-foot long cotton woven wall hanging, indigo-dyed ikat, stimulated her thinking about her own ancestors and additional works in that vein.

Connections with the Mexican art community continue to grow and flourish. The Cranbrook students had a show at the Franz Meyer Museum of Mexico City along with students from Universidad Ibero-Americana under the direction of Marcelino Gutierrez and Lydia Solo. Gutierrez came for the opening of the local show as visiting artist and lecturer.

STILL, WHAT Knodel, trip organizer, said is most important is how the experience brought his course in the history of fibers alive, how the students could see how intricately the fabric is interwoven

into the culture of the people, how it is used, how it is made and how stories and symbols are incorporated into it.

He told the students, "It is all right to take a camera along, but I want you to see it from the point of a pencil," he said. He wanted them to see and experience the levels of civilization that have inspired Mexican artists and designers.

THEY WALKED and sketched around the old Alameda Park, strolled along the Avenida Madero to the heart of old Ciudad Mexico, visited the old area around the Zocalo, saw the cathedrals, visited the markets, climbed the pyramids and pushed through the crowds on the plaza in front of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe to celebrate the birthday of the saint.

"Dolores Olmedo, Diego Rivera's patron, invited the students to her 17th century house," Knodel said. "She treated us like royalty. She was a good friend of Frida Kahlo and owns the Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera museum."

Kahlo was married to Rivera when he was doing the murals for the Detroit Institute of Art. A visit to her garden enclosed by a blue wall was a source of inspiration for several of the students, Knodel said.

MANY OF the student's sketches and excellent photographs by Knodel that help document the trip are on display. There is also a section of historic Mexican textiles loaned by James Basler, artist and professor of art at UCLA, who lived in Mexico for many years. He will be at Cranbrook in January to speak about textiles.

As Knodel had envisioned when he first conceived the idea on a



Gary Knodel described how he read stories about the pyramids as he and the students climbed to the top of the pyramids of the Sun and the Moon at Teotihuacan. On the wall at left is a rug by

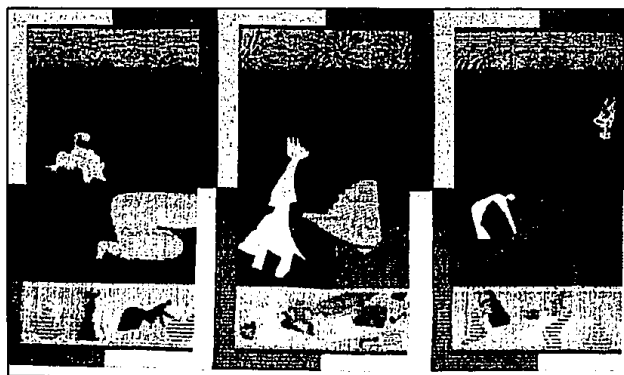
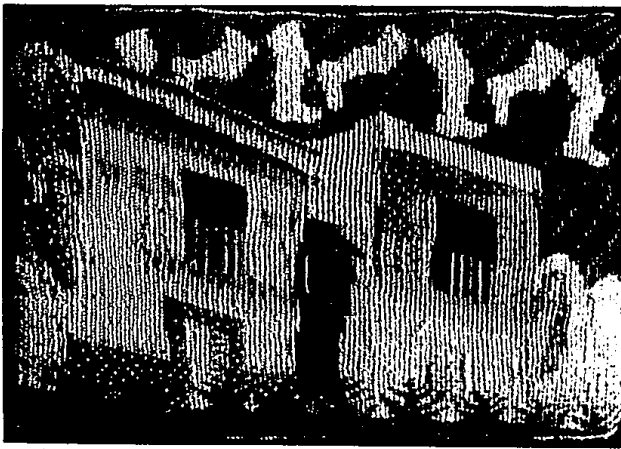
Chad Alice Hagen "Rugs from Mars Series 3: The Original Came After What Was Felt Before, the Gold Dream of Teotihuacan, 1988."

previous visit to Mexico City, the students sensed the influence of layers of civilization that have formed the Mexican culture, the interplay of myth and fact and the response of the people in the form of visual art. In the later works in the Cranbrook show, this translates to a more universal approach. The trip was made possible be-

cause 18 local patrons each gave \$500 to pay for one student's trip. Patrons and students met for before and after parties and each patron received a work of art that came out of the trip.

Knodel said the patron idea was Nancy Yaw's and it was very successful from everybody's standpoint.

He (Knodel) told the students, 'It is all right to take a camera along, but I want you to see it from the point of a pen.'



Two of the tapestries in the exhibit at Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum are at left "Milagros," cotton and silk, by Jodi Johnston and the three-panel "Wheel of Life: Washer Woman Revelation" Bhakti Ziek.

Focusing on a career-oriented lifestyle

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

Separation and divorce spawned two careers for the multi-talented Caren Nederlander.

The days when she was happily married to the president of the New York-based Nederlander Theatrical Organization, mother of two sons, Detroit Institute of Arts docent and person of privilege seem far behind.

Today she's Caren Nederlander, a licensed psychologist, licensed marriage counselor, registered art therapist, director of the Franklin Center for Behavior Change, Southfield, and artist/photographer.

SHE HAS a strong background in and bent toward painting, but found photography fitted more neatly into her new career-oriented lifestyle.

"Photography became a quick way for me to be creative," she said, recalling her first photographs were of rock stars taken from her often-occupied front row seat at Pine Knob.

But when her camera became a serious creative tool after her separation, she concentrated on flowers and landscape.

"It became art therapy for me too," she said. "I started traveling all over the world, taking pictures of the beauty of nature, the shifting shades of nature. I had to develop a new direction. I knew I had to develop interests outside myself."

NEDERLANDER HAD an apartment in New York City and soon she was studying at the International Center of Photography. She spent years in private lessons with Robert Blake, who taught there, and studied locally with Monte Nagler.

She worked with both as she began to develop a very personal style with her camera — one that is as much about art as it is about photography.

"Color photography interested me the most because of my painting — it's never been my goal to be realistic. I also wanted to create an illusion of motion," she said.

'Color photography interested me the most because of my painting — it's never been my goal to be realistic.'

— Caren Nederlander

THE IMPRESSION of motion in Nederlander's photographs is produced because she takes them while she is in motion — walking, riding on a horse, on trains and in cars. Every weekend, she took a trip, camera in hand, looking for subjects.

"In one roll or one trip, I'd find only one picture I'd like," she said.

She has the chosen few printed on 30-by-40-inch canvas in limited editions of 25, then paints a glaze on top of them for permanency.

"I would travel especially to where the peak color is — this is all motion, if you take a picture in motion, you get motion," she said.

AT NEDERLANDER'S first show of works at the Frame Shop in Gallery East in East Hampton, N.Y., "a

lot of people bought them," she said. Her photographs are available in galleries in Washington, D.C., and New York, and at the Robert Kidd Gallery of Birmingham.

She has just published her first book of her impressionist color photographs, "Changing Views." It is available at I Browse of West Bloomfield, Metro News of Birmingham, Book Beat of Oak Park and the Cranbrook Academy of Art book store.

The book contains many of her best photographs with accompanying prose, which sounds a good deal like Nederlander's conversational style. Wendy Rollin was editorial assistant. While the lines beside each color photograph sometimes explain the picture, often as not they explain

the photographer.

LATE SEPTEMBER A Monet vision in Michigan: Proud Lake Recreation Area. Twenty minutes from my home, I can ride my horse, Pal along solitary trails through an impressionist's landscape.

NEDERLANDER HAS been shooting with a Nikon ever since the days when she was in the front row at Pine Knob. Now she also carries a small Contax III camera in her purse, so she is always ready when a good photograph shows up. An exhibit of her work will be at Ariana Gallery of Birmingham next spring.

Nederlander, who has two adult sons, Eric and Bob, said that the photography is her art therapy, a subject she knows a lot about. And there is enough painting-type activity involved in the process to keep her happy.

She still does paintings of houses on commission and says her life is busy and challenging. She wouldn't have it any other way.



Caren Nederlander has just published a book of color photographs illustrating her personal impressionistic style, "Changing Views."