

Creative Living

CLASSIFIED REAL ESTATE



Co Abatt editor/644-1100

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(S.F.)D

Animal sculptures steal the show

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

You touch the bristly hair on the life-size boar at Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association and you still can't believe it's not the real thing.

The boar is one of many animal sculptures by William Allen of Maple City on display at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association through August. This is the first time Allen has shown his collection of exotic animals in Birmingham although he was in a show at the County Galleria in Pontiac last year and in one at the Pontiac Arts Center in 1986.

His life-size Galapagos tortoise is on the patio outside the side door and a much more intimidating, open-mouthed, life-size alligator snapping turtle is on the deck. Both of these are copper and bronze with a patina that Allen says will improve with age and exposure to the outdoors. All of the animals, from pedestal to life size, are fabricated one-of-a-kind (no molds) works.

THE TALL, lean, quiet artist said, "Reptiles are so much fun — metals are a perfect medium for them. The turtles are copper and bronze, so they can go outside, but steel is my favorite material. There's much more variety of texture and effects, but the steel ones can't go outside."

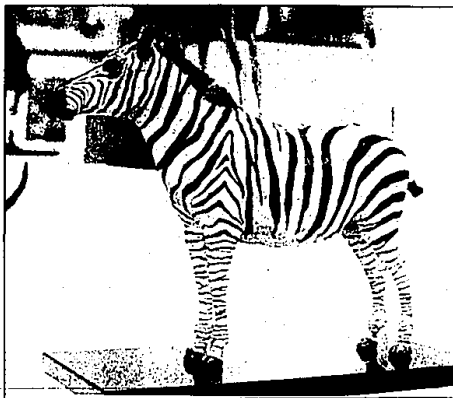
He turned over the hollow tortoise to show the detailed wire skeleton he builds and then covers with metal. He ran his hand over the turtle's back and the wrinkled skin of the neck. "All of this texture is achieved by gas welding and are welding — a lot of the texture is are welding."

Allen said he finds his material in scrap yards. In fact, the discovery of a large supply of copper wire "triggered the creation of the hairy critters," including two bears, an orangutan, a musk ox, a baboon and several others.

The plates of the tortoise's shell are flattened copper tubing, which Allen always looks for when searching for scrap. "I use different chemicals on the shell than I do on the feet, then I treat (the metal) with oil and wax." Standing back to assess the tortoise one more time, he said matter-of-factly, "There's a lot of work involved."

Allen has a degree in biology from Denison University of Ohio and has been carving and painting since he was a youngster, but the animals are really his specialty and first love.

"Just in the last few years, people have been buying my work fairly consistently. I have a gallery in New Mexico that does pretty well for me. My dream



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

William Allen's pedestal-size zebra is made of steel and painted.

'Reptiles are so much fun — metals are a perfect medium for them. The turtles are copper and bronze, so they can go outside, but steel is my favorite material.' — William Allen
sculptor

is to do commission work for museums . . . I really like the idea of public sculpture, so a lot of people can enjoy it."

HIS DREAM is beginning to take shape. This year he completed a life-size sculpture of a calman (a South American crocodile) for the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. He did a snapping turtle for the Detroit Zoo in 1987 and a life-size walrus for the Brookfield Zoo of Chicago that same year and a piece for the Oakland County Executive office building in 1990.

Saying, "I love to work life-size," Allen said he has that opportunity because he's having a show of life-size pieces at the new art museum in Traverse City next spring. Included on his list is a baby hippo and a komodo or dragon lizard (10 foot long). He describes himself as "pretty much self-taught."

In addition to his biology background, he said he watches animals in zoos, on nature programs and in books and magazines. He doesn't strive to make exacting reproductions, but to present them as art, "to have fun with them and do what seems right."

His skill in handling metal and as a welder, his knowledge of how to treat it for special effects all help to convey beauty and excitement that he finds in the world of exotic animals. His exhibit continues through Sept. 7. Prices range from \$550-15,000.

In addition to Allen's animals, there is a show of works by Rental Gallery artists and the range, scope and ability of these represented deserves a round of applause. Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association is at 1516 S. Cranbrook, at 14 Mile, Birmingham. Hours are 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday.



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

William Allen says the patina on his tortoise will keep turning from rich bronze to a soft green. Much of the copper and bronze for this handsome beast was found in a scrap yard.

Skewing still life traditions

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

One quick look at Manny Farber's paintings at Susanne Hilberry Gallery of Birmingham tells you several things. This artist loves paint, loves color and is, at the very least, his own person.

He isn't hooked on mainstream art, fads or some wonderful teacher in his early training. Sort of reluctantly, he reveals bits and pieces of himself in these charming paintings in his choice of elements and written messages. These are presented in the form of notes on the canvas mixed in with the flowers and often garden or building tools.

He frequently works large, anywhere from 21 by 21 inches, to 5 by 10 feet, laying down several layers of paint.

THEN HE may work back into the layers or paint kind of isolated vignettes of a few loose flowers, a pot

of a vase of flowers on top of the layers (or maybe paint them first and fill in around them) and rather haphazardly link them together visually across the canvas with elements such as the tools.

The notes he sticks rather randomly on the canvas. He stretches his canvases flat on the floor and literally places the objects on it as he paints.

Consequently he often ends up with a looking down and into view rather than a frontal or side view. This creates a strong sense of intimacy by drawing the viewer right into the center of the subject.

His arrangements seem as unstudied as those of a garage or garden work table. Yet these apparently casual arrangements of fragile and less-than-fragile objects keep the eye moving over, around and through the action as fast as an auto-race or a Ping-Pong match.

His flowers are truly beautiful. His vision is delightfully skewed. At times his written comments in combination with his arrangements and choice of subjects turn his works into the artistic counterpart of a stream of consciousness literary effort.

FARBER, A 74-year former construction worker, successful film and art critic, always wanted to be an artist and has been one in one sense or another all of his life.

This is his first show at Susanne Hilberry Gallery and possibly his first in this metropolitan area. It establishes a refreshing, exhilarating presence.

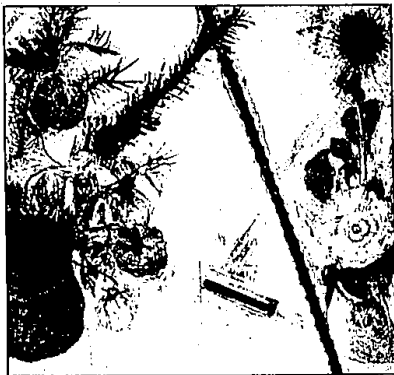
His flowers are truly beautiful. His vision is delightfully skewed. At times his written comments in combination with his arrangements and

choice of subjects turn his works into the artistic counterpart of a stream of consciousness literary effort.

He doesn't kid around. He's not the most patient, best adjusted guy this side of the Hudson River — he may, however, be one of the more talented.

He and his wife, Patricia Patterson, are displaced New Yorkers living in California.

The show continues through Aug. 24. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 555 S. Woodward, Birmingham.



Manny Farber's 21-by-21-inch oil-on-board, done this year, is called "Mid March."

Short story collection falls short

"The Matter is Life" by J. California Cooper (227 pp., Doubleday, \$18).

This collection of short stories by J. California Cooper is surprising. Unfortunately, the surprises are not all that pleasant.

By the time you have read Cooper's book dedication (to Pharaoh Akhenaten, Dian Fossey and her gorillas, Tootie's untouchables and others), her acknowledgments, the author's note at the beginning of the book and the sensitive, absolutely enchanting first story, "The Big Day" (about a sassy nonagenarian attending the funeral of a good friend), you're definitely looking forward to what's coming next.

What comes next, though, is disappointing. With the exception of a ludicrously horrific tale, "Evergreen

Grass," in which an ordinary farmer's livestock dies in a most extraordinary way, none of the remaining half-dozen stories really lives up to expectations.

Cooper, author of the highly popular novel, "Family," plus three more short-story collections (including the 1989 American Book Award winner, "Homemade Love") and 17 plays, was in town recently to read from her work and autograph copies of the book.

IN "THE Matter of Life," she has put together eight tales centering around some of life's meanest miseries. Murder, drugs, drinking, greed, physical abuse, emotional abuse, selfishness, cheating, thievery, sloth, ignorance, poverty, loneliness, fear and utter despair — you name it,

you'll probably find it playing an integral part in one of these stories.

In "The Doras," a long, unwieldy story about a poverty stricken, hard-working but always loving black woman and her four daughters, mental retardation, physical deformity and other birth defects figure in, too. In another story ("No Lie"), a promiscuous egotist faces old age alone, wishing he had more time to put to use his acquired "wisdom." ("I'd get me a young girl and have plenty babies. I'd stay around long enough to let them know I was their daddy for I felt.")

In another ("Friends, Anyone?"), a materialistic psychologist can't understand why she has no one ("I am smart. I have a degree and I am gorgeous.") An abusive husband gets his due in "I Told Him!" Male charac-

ters don't come off too well in these stories, by the way. Sometimes nefarious, sometimes merely shiftless, they're rarely admirable.

In a collection such as this, the effect of each individual story is eventually weakened by this plethora of misery, intense and almost unrelieved as it is. And, after awhile, not only does the adversity become tiresome, it starts to feel ludicrous, too.

IN ADDITION to this monotonous litany of pain, confusion reigns at several points in the collection. Most of the tales are narrated by a lively, folksy "voice" usually identified as that of a close friend or neighbor observing the events. The trouble is, this ordinary viewpoint character inexplicably can see into other people's minds, discern their innermost



book break

Victoria
Diaz

feelings and knows what is said in private conversations, whether she happens to be present or not.

Why Cooper has chosen to disregard this inconsistency in her viewpoint characters is an odd little mystery. How the first person narrator in "Friends, Anyone?" is able to recall in detail an event that occurred during her infancy is also an odd mystery. Another puzzler: why the couple called the Conets throughout "Evergreen Grass" is suddenly referred to as the Millers at the end of the story.

A final thought: One imagines Cooper

per sitting down to her desk one morning and perhaps saying to herself, "Maybe I should write a story to illustrate the evils of self-absorption and drugs, and sometime later, out comes 'Vanity,' a story in this collection about a beautiful, narcissistic woman who does indeed illustrate the evils of self-absorption and drugs. I suppose — which is what most of the stories here are.

Like most parables, it's instructive and predictable. And as in most

Please turn to Page 3