

THURSDAY, AUGUST 13, 1992

CREATIVE LIVING

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Ancient art tells of tradition



Shining example: This carving of a parrot withholding a bone from a dog illustrates a parable about good leadership. Made of gold leaf over wood, the carving adorned the top of a court official's staff. It is an example of the intricate African art on display at Donna Jacobs Gallery Ltd. in Birmingham this month.

■ A display of art from Africa tells about cultures and traditions. The likes of the featured sculpture, textiles and jewelry are becoming more and more rare with Westernization.

BY MARY KLEMIC
STAFF WRITER

The voices of old cultures sing out with vigor and humor in the current exhibit at Donna Jacobs Gallery Ltd., on the second floor at 574 N. Woodward in Birmingham.

The display, "Of Royalty and Ritual: A Choice Selection of African Art," which continues through Aug. 29, features examples of Sub-Saharan African art that tell the tale of traditions soon to be lost to Westernization.

Time was an important element of the works. The artists who made these quality pieces spent a great deal of it on the intricate patterns and delicate detail in gold, wood, ivory, beads and textiles.

The jewelry, sculpture and clothing on display originate from Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Zaire, Tanzania, Kenya and South Africa.

Carved sword pommels and standards carried by officials usually were scenes from parables of good leadership. The carvings, gold leaf over wood, are surprisingly lightweight.

One example is a 13 1/4-inch standard from a staff that once belonged to a high official in an Akan court of Ghana in the late 19th or early 20th century. The work shows a parrot keeping a bone from a dog. Such details as the dog's expression, its tail curving around its legs, and its arched position that is almost human can bring a smile to a viewer.

An Akan tribal necklace of the same time as the standard was associated with royalty, highly prized by chiefs and queen mothers. Called a "saman," which means assemblage, it features a variety of different pieces in high-karat gold and fine filigree work. Many of the

pieces have proverbial or spiritual significance.

The clothing on display includes an "asaso," an Ashanti tunic from Ghana adorned with pouches of fur and leather from around the 1920s. The pouches hold amulets that protected the king's chief priest during religious ceremonies.

Among the unusual textiles in the exhibit is a large cloth from Zaire that was wrapped around a dancer to make a dress. Made of palm fiber, it features a bright purple band that was tie-dyed rather than embroidered.

A vibrant Kente cloth, also from Ghana, is a seldom seen deep red. The pattern includes images of animals and figures, geometric shapes and what looks like the points and tails of arrows. The 6-by-9-foot cloth was made in strips and sewn together.

A wedding train made of beadwork trailed off the shoulders and down the back of a bride of the Ndebele people of South Africa. Its bright colors on a white background depicts houses. Many such trains featured domestic scenes.

Women of the village wore aprons that expressed their single or married status. A woman married a long time wore an apron with more elaborate work. Other designs in the aprons, resembling modern art, matched the geometric paintings on houses in the village.

A gold ring bears symbols of the zodiac, showing the European influence. Some beads resemble eyes. Dutch traders brought other colorful beads.

Hours are 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. Call 540-1600.

Spread the word now to build art coalition

Public art takes many shapes and sizes. A walk around Birmingham reveals several examples. But others you may not consider include the Statue of Liberty, Mount Rushmore and the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C.

They all have something in common. Outdoor works are free and accessible to everyone. They can tell history, offer educational opportunities and serve as landmarks. They give people a chance to stop and contemplate in a rushing world. A public sculpture in a community can serve as a focal point or a meeting place, as does the Calder sculpture in Grand Rapids.

Marilyn Wheaton, executive director of Concerned Citizens for the Arts in Michigan and Michigan Advocates for the Arts, shared those thoughts at the Aug. 5 general membership meeting of the Cultural Council of Birmingham-Bloomfield.

Wheaton talked about art in public places, its funding and importance. The setting of the meeting was Harriet Alpern's Bloomfield Hills home, which is filled with art.

Talk isn't cheap when it comes to supporting the arts. It can be worth millions. That's because the arts can't depend on government funding. (Government and the arts "are in bed together but they're going through a horrible divorce," Wheaton said.) With good humor and patience, supporters should look to collaborations and coalitions. And communication.

Talk about how important art is, and what good it can do. Talk to business people and artists. Find creative ways to recognize people for their help. Work with community governments. Keep having fund-raisers. Consider having tax-designated revenue for the arts.

Wheaton praised Birmingham's art in public places project, City Scapes, which began in May with the installation of four sculptures around the community, and project chairman Corinne Abatt and workers. Don't take the art away, Wheaton said.

"I encourage you to put sculpture of that quality in all the places."

Abatt told about guiding Pierce School children on a tour of artist Robert Seastock's "Dilemma" at Pierce and Brown, and their delight in exploring the work. She encouraged the youngsters to tell their parents, Abatt said.

"Take those kinds of stories to business people," Wheaton replied.

Wichita businessman George Abiah bought more than 100 Henry Moore works and put them in his office park development. After talking with a long-time friend of Moore's, Abiah got the idea to put 25 of the sculptures in New York City public parks, where they could be shared with the public.

In Michigan, only Kalamazoo has set aside a percentage of the general fund for the arts and culture, Wheaton said. Kalamazoo has 1 percent of its general fund so designated.

The nationwide SOS! (Save Outdoor Sculpture) program involves taking an inventory of outdoor sculpture and promoting its care. In Michigan, the volunteer effort is directed by Michael Panhorst of the Marshall Fredericks Sculpture Gallery.

Budget cuts by Gov. John Engler has held up the publication of a catalog listing about 14,000 outdoor works in Michigan, Wheaton said. This inventory began in 1989.

"That's an important document," Wheaton lauded U.S. Sen. Donald Riegle and Carl Levin and state Sen. Michael Bouchard as strong supporters of the arts.

"If there ever was a supporter of the arts in Lansing, it's Michael Bouchard."

The cultural council promotes the Birmingham-Bloomfield area as an arts and cultural center and serves as an information resource, catalyst and advocate for cultural resources in the greater community.

Individual annual memberships are \$15, corporate memberships are \$35. If you'd like to join, send checks to Phebe Goldstein at 4347 Karen Lane, Bloomfield Hills 48302.

Art in store

Another kind of public art is in store at Neiman Marcus on Big Beaver Road in Troy, which opened last week.

Customers find themselves in an artistic wonderland of well over 200 pieces, from the large pine wood and steel sculpture outside the store to the works in various sizes that hang on walls or stand on shelves inside.

The art is part of the Neiman Marcus Corporate Collection, developed by retailer Stanley Marcus. It's a way the store reinvents in the area, said Joe Perzko of Neiman Marcus sales promotion and visual presentation.

The store worked closely with Roy Slade, president of the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, to find leading galleries and artists.

See COLLECTION, 4D

Artists set for Meadow Brook fair

BY MARY KLEMIC
STAFF WRITER

The courtyard and gardens of Meadow Brook Hall, on the Oakland University campus at Adams and Walton in Rochester, will be an especially artistic setting this weekend (Aug. 15-16).

Saturday and Sunday are the days of the 16th annual Art at Meadow Brook, the outdoor fair run by members of Creative Council. Creative Council is a women's artist group started at OU 20 years ago.

You could think of the media on display in the juried art fair as adding an extra touch to an elegant setting, just as the contemporary line of jewelry by Robin Servo of Bloomfield Hills can add an extra touch to an outfit.

"I like to work small," said Servo, one of the artists featured in the event this year.

Servo does custom work in all kinds of jewelry. Silver, gold and semi-precious stones are among the materials she can transform into earrings, pins, necklaces and other accessories in unusual shapes and patterns.

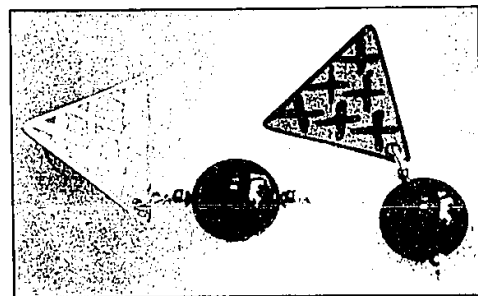
Servo's pins may be long and slender like pencils. Her earrings may feature smooth orbs hanging from hoops or from triangles, or be flat circles bearing designs. Her necklaces may combine various shapes and materials. An American quilt pattern is a small part of her work.

"There are so many different techniques involved," Servo started work in her medium with her first class in high school. She attended Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City, transferred to Michigan State University and earned

her master's degree from Cranbrook. The artist teaches in Birmingham and at the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit.

"I think a lot of it has to do with... fashion, when you are trying to design jewelry, especially a continuing line of

See FAIR, 4D



Colorful style: These earrings by Robin Servo feature colored orbs hanging from triangles.



Finishing touch: Robin Servo of Bloomfield Hills uses a variety of materials and patterns to make her contemporary jewelry. She will be one of the featured artists at Art at Meadow Brook in Rochester this weekend.

Artbeat features various happenings in the suburban arts world. Send news leads to: Creative Living, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

For information and reviews of musical performances, please turn to the Entertainment section.

■ CORPS SUPPORT

The 1992 Art 'n Apples Festival needs volunteers. T-shirt and poster sales, cider and doughnut sales and greeters are just some of the positions that need to be filled, with shifts that are about three hours long.

The festival will take place 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 12, and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday, Sept.

Art Beat

13, in Rochester's Municipal Park. If you're interested in volunteering, call Pauline at the Paint Creek Center for the Arts at 651-4110.

■ ON THE AIR

Guest hosts on the "Cues Who's Playing the Classics?" program on WQRS-FM this month have an Oakland County connection. The program airs 9-10 p.m. Thursdays.

David Simon, chairman of the board for Franklin Bank, will be the host Aug. 20. Prior to joining Franklin on a full-time basis, he was a partner of the law firm of Simpson Moran of Birmingham.

OCC and Wayne State University graduate Michael Usher, regional manager of the Employment Group Office, will be the host Aug. 27. Usher began his career as a sales promotion assistant at Kelly Services Inc. world headquarters in Troy.

■ FULBRIGHT HONORS

Two 1992 master of fine arts graduates of the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills have received Fulbright scholarships.

Kristin L. Tollefson has been awarded a Fulbright travel grant for a year of study in Iceland. Tollefson, a Bainbridge Island native and a 1989 graduate of Carleton College, received her master of fine arts degree in metalsmithing in May. She will continue her art work at the Straumur Artcommune in Hafnarfjordur, near the capital city of Reykjavik.