

# ARTS & LEISURE

KEELY WYGONIK, EDITOR • 313-953-2105 SUNDAY, MARCH 9, 1997 • PAGE 1 SECTION C

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

## Securing public funding for arts magical feat

If Steve Weikal is wondering when to perform his most important sleight-of-hand trickery, many in the arts community are hoping that a Houdini-like performance will happen soon.

Weikal, an acclaimed magician who studied under Harry Blackstone Jr., is the director of the Oakland County Office of Arts, Culture and Film. To say the least, he's caught between a rock and the proverbial hard place.

His office serves as an advocate for cultural development, but his bosses are rather timid about talking about any public funding for arts. Nowhere was the dilemma facing arts in the budget-tightening '90s more apparent than with the recent debate of the regional supplemental funding proposal.

Proposal

At the end of the legislative session last December, the funding proposal known as Senate Bill 1053 failed. It never even made it to the floor for a vote. Modeled after thriving public funding programs in Denver, Chicago and San Francisco, the proposal would have provided steady funding for tier-one culture organizations, such as the DIA, Meadowbrook, Cranbrook and the Detroit Zoo. The plan also would have enacted a tri-county arts grant program administered locally to support more peripheral art groups.

Opponents of the proposal were either against any form of tax, against public funding for the arts, or didn't like the idea that Oakland County would generate 42 percent of the tax revenue, but only get one-quarter membership on the proposed 16 member tri-county cultural council. The remaining dozen seats would have been divided equally among representatives from Macomb, Wayne and Detroit.

With the approval of voters, the proposal called for a 1/2 mill property assessment to generate \$40.7 million in tax revenue. Certainly, it was a progressive move toward building up those cultural institutions operating at 50 percent funding level from the late 1980s. Keep in mind that the recent Presidential Report on Arts Funding called for an across-the-board increase in federal funding. The current rate is about 85 cents per citizen. The proposed federal increase would raise that amount to about \$2.

While it's becoming starkly apparent that government must become more innovative in fostering cultural institutions and arts organizations, the recent debate shows that we're floundering with defensive political wrangling. Political gamesmanship has replaced providence in a debate that should be encouraging a tri-county wide alliance for higher culture.

"Right now, we don't have a regional framework for cooperation," said

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## Video exhibit

Active art experience takes Cranbrook to the cutting edge

Video



Controversial clown: Video exhibit has had visitors to Cranbrook Art Museum's "Being & Time" wondering about the meaning of the antics of the Bozo look alike. The exhibit runs through March 29.

BY FRANK PROVENZANO  
STAFF WRITER

A few moments after entering Cranbrook's six-video installation exhibit, "Being & Time," there's little doubt that viewing art will no longer be a passive experience. Not only has Cranbrook redefined "an engaging art experience," the show has further legitimized the art museum's claim as the area's foremost contemporary art museum.

Now in the last three weeks of its 2-1/2-month exhibit, the show is expected by Cranbrook to attract even more visitors to the record-attendance setting "Being & Time," the largest-ever video projection exhibit in Michigan. Unlike Cranbrook's dramatically bizarre Alexis Rockman painting exhibit and the international jewelry show from last fall, "Being & Time" has largely drawn visitors from outside the museum's membership.

"We like to use the phrase 'We're on the cutting edge,'" said Gregory Whittkopp, Cranbrook's executive director. "But until two years ago, we never really were." Becoming "cutting edge," according to Whittkopp, has meant using the museum's 15,000-square-foot exhibit space more as a forum for new works than a place to show 20th-century collectables.

During Whittkopp's two-year tenure, Cranbrook has been credited with ambitious, timely and—in the case of "Being & Time"— gutsy exhibits. The result has resonated throughout the local art scene.

"With this show, we've received formal thank you's from around the art community," said Whittkopp. That type of enthusiastic reception, he said, fits within Cranbrook's paramount goal as an educational institution. "Having a well-attended exhibition means we're meeting our goal of presenting challenging, yet accessible art."

Based on popular response to "Being & Time," many but only admire the video artistry but are revisiting the exhibit to study the

**What: "Being & Time"**  
**Where:** Cranbrook Art Museum, 1221 N. Woodward, Bloomfield Hills  
**When:** Through Saturday, March 29  
**Hours:** Wed., Fri., Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thur., 10 a.m.-9 p.m.; Sun., 12-5 p.m.  
**Admission:** Adults, \$4; full-time students, children and senior citizens, \$2; children under 7, free.  
**Special Event:** Family Day, Saturday, March 15, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Families are invited to participate in a variety of hands-on activities designed to enhance understanding of the "Being & Time." For more information, call (810) 645-3312.

seminal works. Particularly, the exhibit has attracted younger audiences of the "leather and grunge" crowd, said David Rau, curator of education at Cranbrook Art Museum. Generally, older audiences have been entranced by technical aspects of the video exhibits. Younger audiences, however, are infatuated with the alternative explorations of a medium that they've grown up with, said Rau.

"I've seen a group of students in one of the installation spaces, coats spread out on the floor, just sitting there, staring at the video," he said. "It's like they're sitting in a coffee shop, just hanging out."

Staring at the projected images, however, shouldn't be confused with growing numb with the presentation, a.k.a. the glazed-over MTV ogle. On the contrary, each of the six exhibits offers a broad look at the artistic possibilities of video. It just may be, as many critics have pointed out, the future of art.

### Pushing the boundaries

Arranged on the first and second floors in the arts museum, "Being & Time" features five room-size installations and one free-standing video sculpture. Of the six installations, Bill Viola's "The Greeting," and Gary Hill's "The Ships" offer the most compelling case of pushing the imaginative boundaries of video.

A slow-motion narrative, "The Greeting" is a modern-day adaptation of the New Testament story of



Modern-day adaptation: Retelling of the New Testament story of Mary's visit to her cousin, "The Greeting," is one of six compelling video exhibits included in Cranbrook Art Museum's "Being & Time." Video artist Bill Viola's work was initially presented in 1991 at the museum.

Mary's visit to her older cousin when both were miraculously pregnant. Viola's photographic imagery moves as an animated painting with a mysterious theatricality. Cranbrook first presented video projection art in 1991 with Viola's critically acclaimed "Room for St. John of the Cross."

Whereas Viola's work reaches for the sacred, Hill's "The Ships" is an eerie portrait of human interaction, or lack thereof. In a long narrow room, Hill has designed a room of 12 slivers of light that are transformed into indistinct human figures. Slowly, the figures unfold and walk slowly forward until they

See VIDEO, 2C

## Volunteers are critical to keeping museum open

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN  
STAFF WRITER

In 1991, when the Detroit Institute of Arts was in its darkest days after Gov. John Engler cut nearly \$7 million in state appropriations from the museum's budget, Gallery Service volunteers stepped in to reopen more than 100 galleries.

Today, the 390 Gallery Service volunteers account for just one of the eight branches, which comprise the DIA's Volunteer Committee. In 1996, 1,200 volunteers worked 77,680 hours, or the equivalent of 35 full-time employees.

These Volunteer Committee members provided gallery and Founders Society membership information, served as Art to the Schools and museum docents and staff aides, spoke to various community organizations, and worked as sales and stock staff in museum shops at the DIA, Twelve Oaks and Somerset Malls.

According to Dianne Abel, DIA associate director of development for volunteer services and special events, the museum needs at least 180 more volunteers to fill a variety of positions on eight service committees.

Anyone interested in volunteering should plan to attend an orientation session 12:30 p.m. Sunday, March 16, in the Lecture Hall. For more information, call (313) 833-0247.

"The need for volunteers is critical to operating the museum," said Abel. "We have a vast array of areas where volunteers are needed. If you have the time, we have the spot for you."

Wendy Evans of Bloomfield Hills, a museum docent for 12 years, and former chairman of the Museum Docent committee, found volunteering as a DIA docent so exciting that she returned to Wayne State University to earn a master's degree in art history. A professor of art history at the

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University of Michigan-Dearborn, Evans teaches the "Survey of World Art" course as part of the DIA's 10-month training program for museum and Art to the Schools docents.

"Our primary function as museum docents is to: give tours to school children from preschool to 12th grade even on Tuesdays when the museum is closed," said Evans. "Our aim is to introduce the students to the arts and get them excited about it. It's hard work, but we love it. The kids are fun. The only requirement is to love children and like art."

Docent vice-chairman Elaine Adams of Bloomfield Hills also enjoys taking school children from as far away as the Upper Peninsula and Alpena on museum tours. Adams specializes in DIA tours of the ancient world of Greece, Mesopotamia and Rome.

"The children love the mummies; they're really fascinated with the mummies," said Elaine Adams. "At the end when I ask 'Was the museum what you expected?' they say they thought it would be all paintings. But the DIA is so much more. After seeing the sculpture, pottery and weavings, they begin to have a feel for the culture."

A former banker with a degree in communication, Adams is proof volun-

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ART FESTIVAL

## Wildlife Art Festival celebrates conservation

**14th Annual Michigan Wildlife Festival**  
**When:** Friday-Sunday, March 14-16, 4-9 p.m. Friday; 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.  
**Admission:** Adults and children over 12, \$6; children under 12, free. Show proceeds will fund wildlife habitat restoration by the Michigan Wildlife Habitat Foundation.  
**Where:** Southfield Pavilion, on Evergreen Road between 10 Mile and 11 Mile Roads. For more information, call (517) 852-3110, or (810) 358-4906 (beginning Monday).

BY FRANK PROVENZANO  
STAFF WRITER

On an early morning drive through North Carolina, Heiner Hertling experienced what many artists refer to as "the moment." A insightful realization when composition, lighting and mood interact. Actually, after 25 years as a painter and sculptor, the prolific Hertling has had quite a few "moments."

On this day, Hertling suddenly stopped his car, pulled out his camera and took many photos of horses grazing as their steaming breath mingled with the morning haze. As soon as he got to his easel, Hertling transformed the inspiring sight to

his best-selling painting, "Carolina Morning."

From Friday through Sunday, Hertling, a West Bloomfield resident, will be among 60 artists at the 14th Annual Michigan Wildlife Art Festival, held in the Southfield Pavilion. "Carolina Morning" will be one of Hertling's 48 images displayed at the festival, including 20 new works. Along with painters, this year's festival features woodcarving, photography, bronze sculpture and glass artists.

The annual festival, according to U.S. ART, is one of the top five wildlife exhibits in the nation. Other high-profile wildlife art venues

include annual festivals in Charleston, Seattle and eastern Maryland. Coincidentally, early developers of the art form lived in the Chesapeake Bay area, a fertile environment for wildlife.

Sponsored by the Michigan Wildlife Habitat Foundation, the festival is a major fund-raising event for the nonprofit conservation group. Established by a citizens initiative in the early 1980s amid massive budget cuts at the Department of Natural Resources, the foundation has restored more than 5,000 acres of wetlands in 70 of 83 counties.

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Home on the range: Animals and natural landscapes are part of the appeal of the 14th Annual Wildlife Art Exhibit at the Southfield Pavilion, Friday-Sunday. Heiner Hertling, a West Bloomfield resident, is one of the artists in the show.