

ARTS & LEISURE

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CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

Susanne Hilberry shows art that can't be ignored

Art galleries often wonder if the postcard they send with images of a new exhibit will persuade people to come see their latest show. At the Susanne Hilberry Gallery in Birmingham, they wonder if their announcement will even make it past post office inspectors.

Some might call the gallery's postcard bawdy, obscene or scandalous. With the image of a risqué transsexual boasting a revealing — albeit slightly modified — birthday suit, the Hilberry's announcement of LA photographer Catherine Opie's exhibit shook up quite a few people, right? Actually, hardly anyone noticed.

Art is so ignored these days," said Joyce Brienza, who assists Hilberry at the South Woodward Gallery. "I don't know what it would take to cause a controversy."

From cross-dressing NBA players to body piercing high-school kids, the boundaries that once defined gender and aesthetics are being rubbed away or covered by tattoos. Call it an expression of freedom, post-modernism, eclecticism or any other term.

Regardless, it's getting more difficult to recognize the difference between sheer hedonism, an honest individual statement, a derivative work of art or authentic artistic expression. Hilberry, for one, believes that it's time for a community discussion on issues typically discussed on MTV rather than in mainstream suburbia.

Through April 26, with Opie's lurid photos of transsexuals and opulent images of Beverly Hills mansions, Hilberry hopes to further a discussion about sexuality, prejudice and decadence. The irony, of course, is that the exhibit doesn't make it clear where to draw the line on what is socially acceptable or perverse.

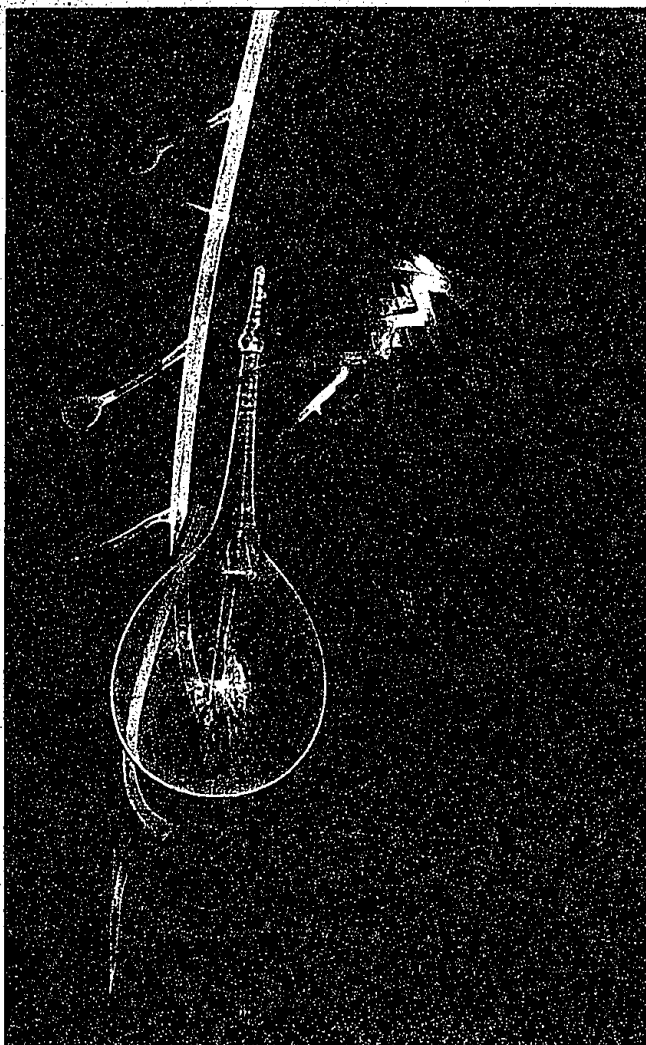
"I don't expect people to love what we show, but I do want people to become comfortable with looking at art," said Hilberry, whose soft voice shouldn't be taken for indecisiveness.

Exploration beyond appearances

For more than 20 years, Hilberry has built a reputation for bringing engaging exhibits to the area. She takes pride in not following the latest trend, or showing only art that has a good chance of selling. Few other local galleries exist according to the credo, "Art for art's sake."

Of course, all of Hilberry's talk about "art" and the need to challenge audiences can sound too serious for those who mistake watching Jenny Jones with a community discussion.

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Hot Property: Mundy Hepburn worked with glass, neon gas and rope to create this glowing 86 by 36 by 48-inch piece titled "Flotsam and Jetsam II."

25th annual International Glass Invitational

What: An exhibition of contemporary studio glass by 100 artists from around the world. Meet more than 25 of the artists during the Grand Opening 8 p.m. Saturday, April 5.

Where: Habatat Galleries, 7 North Gahanna in Pontiac. Call (810) 333-2000.

When: April 5 to May 4. Hours are 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, and noon to 5 p.m.

Related Events: In honor of the 57th annual Michigan Glass Month in April, dozens of exhibitions and activities will take place in cities from Birmingham to Muskegon. Here's a guide to a few of the events:

■ Italian glass artist Lucio Bobbico, an exhibitor in the International, will give glass blowing demonstrations along with Albert Young beginning at noon Saturday, April 5, at the Michigan Hot Glass Workshop, 20 West Lawrence in Pontiac. For more information, call Young at (810) 338-3455.

■ A botanical glass sculpting workshop with Frederick Elkhill and Shane Fox takes place April 4-6 at the University of Michigan Dearborn. Call Richard Post for information (313) 593-5374.

■ Also at U-M Dearborn is an exhibit featuring the glass collection of Bloomfield Hills artist Patricia Hill Burnett in the Alfred Berkowitz Gallery on campus. Opening reception 5:30-7

p.m. Friday April 4, (313) 593-5087.

■ "Ancient Glass: The Beautiful Legacy" April 5 to May 4 at the Donna Jacobs Gallery, LTD, 574 North Woodward, Birmingham, (810) 540-1600.

Reception 3-5 p.m. Saturday April 5, Special Opening 3-4 p.m. Sunday April 6.

■ Sten Megdall of West Bloomfield is one of several glass artists exhibiting work in a show titled "Problems of the Glass Hole" at the Atrium Gallery, 109 North Center in Northville. Call (810) 348-4331. The exhibit, continuing through April, consists of glass bowls, vases, platters, goblets, perfume bottles, sculptural figures, paper weights, and globes.

Exhibit showcases sparkling glass works

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Dozens of wooden shipping crates sat unopened in a cellar-like storage area waiting to reveal their glittering glass treasures in the annual International Glass Invitational April 5 to May 4 at Habatat Galleries.

For 25 years Habatat Galleries has documented the studio glass movement by showcasing the best sculptural works and objects being made by contemporary artists. On a recent visit to the Pontiac gallery, Ferdinand Hampson, founder of the International Glass Invitational, took a nostalgic look back at the largest, oldest and most celebrated exhibition of its kind, and the studio movement which spawned it.

"It's been an uphill struggle getting the medium accepted as a fine art material," said Hampson, a West Bloomfield resident. "We still have to overcome enormous prejudices by artists who feel casting in bronze is important, but casting in glass is not. Every year the International exhibition proves that the art world is becoming more open to using glass as an art material."

Hampson rarely thinks about the past because of his enthusiasm for the future and the promise of new works to come from artists experimenting with the medium.

Thirty of the artists are new to the 1997 exhibition and so is their work. Hampson discovered 10 of the artists during two visits to Czechoslovakia late last year. He is excited about the possibilities of finding even more new artists for the International "because countries like Czechoslovakia are opening up behind the Iron Curtain and names are more available now."

"We make changes every year to maintain the excitement," said Hampson, president of Habatat Galleries in Chicago, Boca Raton, Florida and Aspen, Colorado. "The new Czechoslovakian artists interpret glass slightly differently from the rest of the world. They typically use casting processes and are inspired by Czechoslovakian Cubism, a strong movement that never got the recognition."

Due to the size of this year's show, Hampson has rented the 7th House nightclub across the hall from Habatat Galleries for the month of April. From a few glass objects made by a dozen American artists, the exhibition has grown to 700 works highlighted by 600 spotlights.

Glass working techniques of slumping, casting, fusing, and lamp working used by artists in 1997 were unheard of 25 years ago. Today, many of the exhibiting artists

See GLASS, C2

Best-selling mystery writer takes on British-Irish Feud



BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

With a charmingly genteel British accent, and a glint in her eye, author Anne Perry talks with irrepressible pleasure about the crime that begins her latest novel, "Ashworth Hall."

It's the same lively joy she shows for her recently planted bluebells on her sprawling grounds in the northeast highlands of Scotland.

Perry visited Borders Book Shop in Birmingham Tuesday as part of her two-month U.S. book-signing tour. Currently, "Ashworth Hall," published by The

Ballantine Publishing Group, is listed as the area's fifth best seller, behind perennial top-grossing author John Grisham's "The Partner."

Since her first published novel in 1979, Perry has attracted a growing number of loyal readers, said Larry Wrona, who manages the mystery fiction section at Borders. "All of her books — hard cover and paperback — sell well and consistently," he said.

With the mystery genre generating the largest share of the fiction market, Perry is emerging as a top-ten selling author, not in the class of Grisham or Michael Crichton, but approaching the ranks of Sue Grafton and Sarah Paretsky, said Wrona.

In "Ashworth Hall," Perry displays the type of storytelling virtuosity that has earned her a nomination for this year's prestigious Edgar Award, named in honor of Edgar Allan Poe and presented each May to the top mystery writer.

Set amid a great country estate outside of London, Perry's 24th novel features serial characters Thomas Pitt and his wife, Charlotte. The Pitts have been protagonists in 17 of Perry's Victorian-age novels. This time, however, the Pitts' odyssey transcends the stuffy manners of the Victorian era. In "Ashworth Hall," Perry takes readers into the heart of one of modern history's most longstanding bitter feuds: the British military presence in Northern Ireland.

"It's unfortunately common for people to find themselves with an inherited enemy so old and so deep that they don't remember where the hatred started," said Perry.

Depending on perspective, the armed British presence in Ireland has been called an "invited presence" or an occupation. Discarding polemics, Perry is con-

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