

### CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

## Moving ahead with Gateway sculpture

By now, if all went according to plan, the track of land at the south entrance to Birmingham, along Woodward Avenue, would be the site of a swirling Alice Aycock sculpture of trusses and beams.

Well, at least that's according to the original time table for the project.

The proposed large-scale sculpture, supported by the Cultural Council of Birmingham/Bloomfield, is commonly referred to as the Gateway project because it would be erected at the entryway to Birmingham, arguably the capital of Oakland County.

The joyful abstract design reflects the currents of change running through our area. Its lyrical gestures represent energy, conviviality and a sense of progressiveness.

The Gateway sculpture is especially a timely symbol as Oakland County moves into the new millennium with ever-diverse communities, boundless optimism and further economic growth potential.

Of course, if all went according to plan, by now, the citizens of Birmingham would have already had an open discussion about the invaluable role of public art, and the symbolic meaning of the Gateway sculpture.

Instead, the project has been a sore subject, and has served as a catalyst for contentious discussions about everything from community aesthetics to the rate of change in what some people still believe is a sleepy suburban town.

### Step into the future

About a year ago, the cultural council held an open meeting to solicit community input on the Gateway project.

The meeting turned ugly. Questions arose about the "appropriateness" of the design, the cost and the legitimacy of the cultural council to even make such a proposal.

At its worst, the debate between the supporters and opponents of the Gateway project could be billed as "Arrogance vs. Ignorance." Not exactly the ideal result at a town meeting. For nearly a year, there's been few public signs that the project is moving ahead.

But that doesn't mean the cultural council has given up.

On the contrary, in the last year the cultural council has absorbed many of the suggestions from citizens concerned with the safety, maintenance cost and design of the sculpture.

For instance, the lowest point on the 36-by-120-foot long sculpture now will be 12 feet. Till enough to disallow anyone from climbing on it. And now, using polished aluminum, the maintenance of the sculpture will merely require an occasional power spray wash.

So, what are the lessons of the past year?

For the vocal minority who oppose the Gateway sculpture: time a change. For the cultural council and their supporters: sometimes well-intentioned plans go awry.

Sensing a need to reinvigorate the project, the cultural council will soon commence on a new campaign to win corporate and public support.

The cultural council will remind citizens that the sculpture is a gift, not a bribe. And perhaps the cultural council will remind Birmingham citizens that it's time everyone realizes that Aycock's abstract design is intended to inspire, not divide.

What often gets overlooked is that the \$300,000 sculpture will be financed through individual, corporate and public donations. (About 10 percent has already been raised.)

Taxpayers will not be assessed one penny. Most taxpayers should like the sound of that.

For a public sculpture by a preeminent international public-art sculptor the cost is a mere fraction of the typical fee, usually ranging from \$750,000 upward.

Once a few corporate donors come on board to help finance the project, the reality of the Gateway sculpture

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## Exhibition documents 'Turning Point'

# Monet

BY LINDA ANN CHOMEN  
STAFF WRITER

Since the announcement by the University of Michigan Museum of Art nearly a year ago, art enthusiasts from Birmingham to Plymouth have anxiously awaited the Monet exhibition, which explores the French Impressionist's work around the year 1880 (see accompanying story).

For the first time since leaving his studio in Vetheuil more than a century ago, 12 paintings by Monet are reunited for an exhibition at the museum Jan. 25 to March 15.

Organized by the University of Michigan Museum of Art, "Monet at Vetheuil: The Turning Point" features paintings not shown at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1995, and four oils never exhibited in North America. The landscapes, still life and a portrait of his wife, Camille, add a new dimension to a relatively unstudied period of Monet's life and work in Vetheuil.

### Turbulent times

This small village on the Seine is where Monet's life reached a critical point because of his wife's illness and death, negative criticism of his work, isolation from friends and the art scene in Paris and financial problems which forced the Monet family to share a household with supporter Ernest Hoschede, his wife and six children.

A haunting portrait of Camille from the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, was painted shortly after her death in September of 1879. Monet detached himself from the situation in order to record the changing colors in his wife's face.

On loan from 10 museums, including ones in Madrid, Paris, New Zealand, Toronto and the Metropolitan in New York City, the paintings travel to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the Dallas Museum of Art after Ann Arbor.

"I think the exhibition will come up with a whole different side of Monet," said museum interim director Carole McNamara who curated the exhibition with Annette Dixon, museum curator of Western Art. "This was such a rich experience even for someone who thinks they know everything there is to know about Monet. This most familiar of painters will be in his most unfamiliar mode. You'll see paintings you have never seen. You will never look at Monet again in the same way."

The three years Monet spent at Vetheuil (1878-1881) were filled with conflict. A leading artist in the painting revolution known as Impressionism, Monet suffered from depression. As he was about to turn 40, he wrote to his friend and patron de Bellis that there was no hope left because he'd painted nothing worthy to show at an upcoming Impressionists exhibition. The depression was to haunt him periodically throughout the rest of his life.

In 1994, using the museum's painting of the Debauche to focus on Monet's years in Vetheuil, McNamara and Dixon began contacting museums around the world in search of paintings from this period.

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Turning Point: "La Debauche a Vetheuil" from Musée Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, one of four paintings depicting the devastating winter thaw of the Seine in 1880.



Haunting portrait: Monet recorded the changing colors in his wife Camille's face shortly after her death in September of 1879.

### Monet at Vetheuil: The Turning Point

What: For the first time since leaving his studio more than a century ago, the paintings of French Impressionist Claude Monet come together in an exhibition of works created during the most turbulent period of his life.

When: Jan. 25 to March 15. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday, until 9 p.m. Thursday, and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. Docent-led tours 7 p.m. Thursdays, and 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

Where: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 525 South State Street at South University, Ann Arbor. (734) 764-0395.

Cost: \$6 adults; \$3 for non-U-M students, U-M faculty and staff, and senior citizens; free to Museum Friends, U-M students, and children under age 12. Advance tickets are recommended, call (800) 585-3737.

Related activities: Monet and the Cultural and Social Milieu of Impressionism, an interdisciplinary symposium 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 7, in Angell Hall, Auditorium A. North of Here, a dance performance inspired by Monet's winter landscapes at Vetheuil and created by Jessica Fogel and her students in the University Dance Company, 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, Feb. 5-7, and 2 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 8, at the Power Center. For tickets call (734) 764-0450.

A Taste of Monet dinner theater featuring Monet's favorite recipes followed by a multimedia presentation written especially for the occasion by Chicago playwright Frances Sebastian 7 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 7, and 8 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 8, at the Michigan League, 914 North University. This dramatic portrait of Monet is based on his letters and enhanced with music and slides showing his works. Tickets are \$40 and seating is limited. For reservations, call (734) 647-7483.

## Art lovers gather for tours

BY LINDA ANN CHOMEN  
STAFF WRITER

With one week to go before the opening of the Monet exhibition at the University of Michigan Museum of Art, excitement continues to build. Docent-led group tours are already filled. Museum interim director Carole McNamara is not sure whether more tours will be added. It depends on demand and if there are enough docents to volunteer their time.

While it's too late to train docents, the museum is in need of volunteers for the Monet exhibition. If you have some spare time, call Diane Sepac, (734) 763-7618.

Former University of Michigan museum administrator Janet Torno took part in the planning stages of the Monet exhibit, begun in 1994. As executive director of the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, Torno is planning a tour for members. She thinks it's important for student painters to view the works as a body representing a critical time in Monet's life.

"It will really be important to the students to see how the paintings relate and how his style evolved," said Torno. "I think, it will be important to see them hung together. And for a painter, there's no substitute for seeing the real object rather than in books."

French teacher Marilyn Kohen booked a tour in October for her seventh and eighth grade students at East Middle School in Bloomfield Hills. She plans to make a day of it. Students will eat at the crepe restaurant Cafe Zola so Kohen can include studies of Emile Zola along with Monet in her lesson plans.

"I'm interested in Impressionism, and have visited several of the museums in Europe, and thought if I could share any of this with my students it will make Monet more than words in a book, and an exhibition like this doesn't come around that often," said Kohen, a West Bloomfield resident.

Before the tour, students will view a video about Monet and one Kohen took herself during a trip to his Giverny gardens.

Besides being a cultural experience, I'm tying it in to their use of adjectives," said Kohen. "When we return from the exhibit, the students will choose a painting and then describe it."

Carol Wold is coordinating a tour for senior citizens from

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## CLASSICAL MUSIC

## New DSO chief marks time while planning future

BY FRANK PROVENZANO  
STAFF WRITER

The most interesting hypothetical question facing Louis Spisto, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's incoming executive director, is: If he took the Pacific Symphony from small-to-big time, then where will he take the DSO?

It might take two years to get an answer.

When Spisto, 41, comes to Detroit to take charge of one of the top orchestras in the United States in March, he'll be following the course



Louis Spisto

set by his predecessor, Mark Volpe, who left the DSO in August to become managing director of the Boston Symphony.

Spisto will arrive to find things neatly in place, including the DSO's 1998-99 concert schedule, planned tours of Europe and Japan, a range of community outreach programs and the finishing phases of the \$80-million Orchestra Place project.

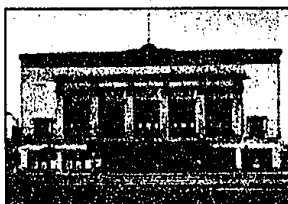
The intangible look of the DSO, however, may soon be distinctively different.

"We need to shape the image of the orchestra, bring it up to date," said Spisto, credited with transforming the formerly "small time" Pacific Symphony into the third largest in California.

### Building relationships

In the long run, the DSO may reflect Spisto's defining personal

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Changes ahead: Spisto will oversee the completion of Orchestra Place and an expanded program schedule.