

Painter puzzles over words, watercolor

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

The longer Nancy Hopper talks, the more detailed a portrait she paints of herself, and her art. Visitors can talk to the Birmingham artist, as well as read into her paintings, Sunday, Feb. 8, at a reception to open her one-woman exhibition in the Livonia Civic Center Library Fine Arts Gallery.

Words dominate the newest of Hopper's 38 paintings in "Sharing My Heart." Hopper began creating the designerly paintings late last summer. But long before painting, words were Hopper's game.

Background

Born in Portland, Ore., Hopper graduated from Oregon State University with a degree in journalism and home economics. She worked briefly for the food section of The Oregonian before becoming a full-time wife and mother. Her background as a journalist, and the fact she is an admirer of Frank Lloyd Wright, Mondrian and Tiffany is evidenced in the jewel colors and architectural nature of her wordy art works.

"I realized I'm always intrigued with the design and

Hilberry's 'Of Mice and Men' finely crafted

John Steinbeck's timeless drama "Of Mice and Men" will run in repertory through March 11 at the Hilberry Theatre on the corner of Cass and Hancock on the campus of Wayne State University in Detroit. Upcoming performances 8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 21; 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 22. Call (313) 577-2972 for dates and additional show times.

BY SUS SUCHYTA
SPECIAL WRITER

Like his novel, John Steinbeck's script transcends time in "Of Mice and Men." Though set in the Depression, the enduring themes, woven simply into the story, can be understood and embraced by any culture and time period.

Lennie is a strong giant of a man with a child's mental capacity. George, his grumbling guardian, has resigned himself to a personally unfulfilling existence because Lennie is completely dependent on him. The two have been on the road, working as hired hands, dreaming of the day when they might have a small place of their own. George must constantly protect Lennie from his own naivete, strength, and the cruelness of others, while suppressing his own frustrations.

David Haig embodied the challenging and difficult role of Lennie with gentleness and poignancy. His speech and gait defined Lennie's limitations without being mocking, and his hesitancy and trusting vulnerability struck a sympathetic chord.

Bret Tuomi, as his frustrated protector George, cemented the illusion of the pair's inseparability. Tuomi's movements, fast and agitated, were in deliberate contrast to Lennie's slow and clumsy ones. His verbal frustration, vented on Lennie, contrasted well with his scenes of touching concern. Tuomi captured the man caught between the desire for his own life and the restraining duty to protect Lennie.

Ultimately, George must choose between the safety of others and Lennie's freedom. Throughout the play hard choices must be made to keep nature in balance with the needs of others. The choices are not always easy.

The ensemble dealt with these choices with sensitivity, without overdramatizing or trivializing emotional scenes. In a simple, but skillful scene, Moments Black as Crows, the socially isolated black ranch hand, deftly illuminated Lennie's aloneness as well.

Peggy Johns, as Curley's wife, embodied the reckless sensuality which was to be her downfall.

The sound effects were outstanding, transporting the audience to a country woods in late evening. The subtle sunrise, water splashed from an on-stage stream, and the smoke curling from the campfire were well-crafted touches as well.

Sharing My Heart

What: An exhibition of paintings and mixed media by Nancy Hopper of Birmingham.

When: Through Monday, March 2. An opening reception to meet the artist takes place 2-4:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 8.

Where: Livonia Civic Center Library Fine Arts Gallery, 32777 Five Mile, (east of Farmington Road), Livonia.

lettering quality, but I don't want it to be the focus of the piece," said Hopper. "I want the focus to be the overall design. I'm doing this instead of painting something from life or a photograph. It's not copying something. It's more creative."

Art has always been a part of Hopper's life. As a young girl, she admired the art work of her mother, a graphic designer. Through college, she took art classes but never considered the subject seriously.

After the birth of her first child, Chuck, she took a watercolor class "to get out of the house."

When Chuck died suddenly before his fourth birthday, Hopper's husband encouraged her to take a class at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association. Becoming engrossed in painting helped ease the pain and encouraged healing.

"Thinking back now to when I was in school, I used to draw circles and fill in the letters of words in the newspapers," said Hopper. "In middle school, I

went to a show of van Gogh's work and thought this is such an ugly subject, just a pair of old boots, and look how beautiful he made it."

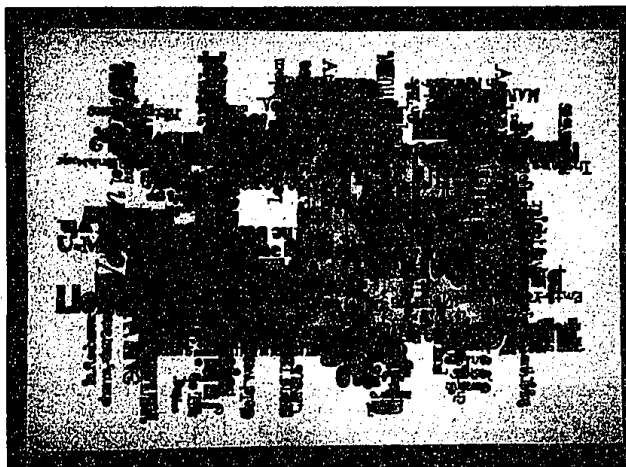
One of Hopper's pieces, "Ritual Sticks" is currently on tour as part of the Michigan Water Color Society's 50th Annual Exhibition which debuted at the Detroit Institute of Arts in November. Spattering about 30 layers of watercolor with a toothbrush, she lays a translucent background for twigs, which almost seem to spell out a word in some foreign or out-of-this-world language. The work was published in the "Best of Watercolor: Creating Texture" by Rockport Publishers in 1997.

"I was intrigued with the resulting patterns of the debris after a bad storm and immediately went outside to photograph the driveway," said Hopper. "When a friend of my son's arrived and asked, what's up Mrs. H? I don't mind if people think I'm strange."

Hopper has no inhibitions when it comes to her art. She does not try to imitate anyone either. That's why she rarely takes classes anymore. Instead, she joined the Farmington Artists Club. At a recent meeting, Oakland Community College art professor Koghan Tasian demonstrated a method of transferring images to paper using an acrylic mat medium. As a result, Hopper created a handful of colorful collages in time for the show.

"The club always has a speaker, and I go to shows at the DIA, Scarab Club, BBAA and the Cary Gallery in Rochester," said Hopper.

Livonia Arts Commissioner



Word puzzle: Nancy Hopper of Birmingham uses text to create paintings in a one-woman show titled "Sharing My Heart."

Billie Thompson is a fellow member of the Farmington Artists Club and books the exhibits in the Fine Arts Gallery. She originally asked Hopper to show her work last September.

"I wanted the chance to show her work in Livonia," said Thompson. "It's fabulous. The colors are bright."

"Midnight Cabbie" plays red, yellow and green traffic lights

against a black background. Dragonflies cover the word globally in a mixed media work rendered in ink, gouache and gold paint. "The Day Brent Drove to North Dakota" incorporates the text "Hamburger Scare Hits States." Brent is Hopper's second son.

"Brent was driving all by himself to North Dakota," said Hopper. "I was nervous so I pulled

headlines from the newspaper and started doing a painting. Sometimes I take the lettering out of the paper, sometimes I work it up on my computer. I use different fonts sometimes ones that are lacy. I sometimes lay the words on top of each other."

Linda Ann Chomin is an arts reporter for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.



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