

Rhymes and reasons plentiful at Elizabeth Stone Gallery

Nearly anyone who's picked up a book owes a bit of gratitude to Margaret Hillert of Beverly Hills.

As the author of 78 beginning-to-read books, the retired first grade teacher has an uncanny style that combines the music of words and the utility of language.

"You probably read one of my books when you were in school," she said matter-of-factly.

Fair enough. Hillert was probably the first influential author for many students.

Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, Fitzgerald and Hemingway came after Hillert. Anyone with kids under 6 are probably reading along to Hillert's books each night.

A few years after she began teaching in the late 1940s, Hillert started "doodling" her own version of the "Three Bears" in a basic vocabulary.

Her doodling turned into a series of primers for young readers, who learned about language while reading about playful bears, pigs and cats.

Then, in the early 1960s, her first book written in the "Dick and Jane" genre was published.

Today, Hillert's total number of published books is just two less than her age.

Sixteen years after she retired from the classroom, she continues to teach.

Not so far away

Hillert is among the nine Michigan authors and illustrators featured at the Elizabeth Stone Gallery's current exhibit, "Books and Art of Michigan Children's Authors and Illustrators."

Hillert's book, "The Sky Is Not So Far Away" is a dreamy, comforting landscape inspiring young readers to wonder about the world.

Other local artists in the exhibit include poet Patricia Hooper of Bloomfield Hills, author of "Bundles of Benets," and the delightful "How the Sky's House-keeper Wore Her Scarves."

And illustrator Cyd Moore of Beverly Hills, whose fanciful art appears on the best-selling "Alice & Greta."

The children's books and original illustrations at Elizabeth Stone Gallery, however, aren't exclusively for readers under 12 years old.

The subject might be about childhood, but it's art collectors and adult-readers who've been stopping by the gallery.

"I think people are tired of all the negative things in the world," said Elizabeth Stone.

"Good literature brings back a sense of wonder," she said.

Sense of enchantment

Long before adults learned about cause and effect, empirical verification and the coherence theory of truth, there was simply a place called "the world."

A place of wonder, mystery and enchantment.

That was before adults learned how to rationalize, make excuses and call their bad habits merely a routine.

In Hillert and Hooper's words and Moore's illustrations the world of "once upon a time" comes to life for anyone at any age — who can simply recite, "I wonder."

From there, a long list of questions about life, the nature of the universe, and even the nature of these people who share the same planet might come to mind.

Some lessons shouldn't be forgotten.



Wonder: Elizabeth Stone represents more than 100 children's book illustrators.

TRANSITIONS AHEAD

Paint Creek's national show reveals future path for arts organization

Although a few paintings still have to be hung in the upstairs gallery, Dawntice Kerchaert is quietly content with the response to the first annual National All-Media Exhibit, which opened Friday at the Paint Creek Center for the Arts in Rochester.

The fact that the inaugural exhibit has been promoted nationally, juried by one of the most acclaimed living sculptors and assembled in a gallery on a Rochester side street might be Kerchaert's first measure of success.

For Kerchaert, exhibition director at PCCA, nearly a year's worth of planning has paid off in a show with an unmistakable technical evenness, and a traditional, if not conservative, aesthetic.

Yet surprisingly, despite drawing on artists from across the country, PCCA's national exhibit has a lack of diversity in subject-matter and a striking absence of cutting-edge motifs and methods.

But that might be only a minor criticism. Perhaps wisely, for now, the views of art critics should be considered decidedly beside the point.

The main point, quite frankly, is that PCCA isn't sitting on its impressive record of success as sponsor of both the annual Celebrate Michigan Artists Competition and Art & Apples Festival.

Nor are they content with the narrow public perception as a community arts organization.

"We're trying to create an awareness that we're here, and we're an opportunity for artists and for the community to educate themselves about art," said Kerchaert.

What: "National All-Media Exhibit," works by 48 artists, juried by Jean Hightstein
When: Through April 24
Where: Paint Creek Center for the Arts, Main Gallery, 407 Pine Street, Rochester; (248) 651-4110

Related interest
What: "Jean Hightstein: Sculpture and Drawing"
When: Through April 25
Where: Hill Gallery, 407 W. Brown Street, Birmingham; (248) 540-9288



Confluence: David Jay Spyer's "Fear, Courage, Sanctuary" is one of the most compelling paintings in the National All-Media Exhibit.

In the future, other spin-off exhibits from the annual all-media exhibit could include shows exclusive to painters, sculptors and watercolorists.

"But we won't do narrow-focused shows," said Kerchaert. "We want to keep things as open as possible."

New signs

Many associate PCCA with the annual fall festival, "Art & Apples," which packs thousands of visitors into Rochester Municipal Park over a September weekend.

PCCA's connection with the annual art festival runs deep.

Revenue from the outdoor art event provides about two-thirds of PCCA's budget.

There are new signs, however, that the 16-year organization is "becoming a major cultural institution" in the area, according to Betty Ruedisuel, executive director.

Growth and influence can be measured in terms of PCCA's budget, which has grown from \$60,000 to \$600,000 in the past decade, and the increasing popularity of their

Impressive Inaugural: Dawntice Kerchaert, PCCA exhibit director, has assembled the work of 48 artists in the first annual National All-Media Exhibit.

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What: "Three plus Four plus Five," featuring a trio, quartet and quintet in a program of Grieg, Brahms and Mendelssohn, sponsored by Lyric Chamber Ensemble
When: 3:30 p.m. Sunday, April 5
Where: Birmingham Unitarian Church, Woodward (at Lone Pine Road)
Tickets: \$18, students/seniors; (248) 357-1111

Spring thaw adds up for Lyric Chamber Ensemble

"A bonbon filled with snow" was the way French composer Claude Debussy described the music of Edvard Grieg.

But inside Grieg's distinctively melodic-Nordic freshness is more than a mere trifle of cool delight.

There's a percolating passion that'd make Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky put down their popcicles.

This Sunday, four members of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra will perform the feverish-paced Grieg Quartet as part of the Lyric Chamber Ensemble's spring concert, "Three plus Four plus Five."

The DSO members will also join renowned pianist Louis Noguera in Brahms' Quintet in F minor, Op. 34.

Rounding out the program will be The Schuster Family Trio performing a movement from Mendelssohn's Trio in D minor, Op. 49. The two brothers and a sister trio are the Lyric's featured "emerging artists."

The performance of the Grieg Quartet is also a preview of the piece to be performed during the DSO's European tour, which begins in May.

"There's an unbelievable appreciation for classical music throughout western Europe," said Geoffrey Applegate, second violinist with the DSO who'll perform the Grieg and Brahms pieces this Sunday as part of a quartet and quintet.

"The audiences turn out and the enthusiasm is almost like playing a rock concert," he said.

Instead of traveling abroad, local groups can congregate at the acoustically pleasing Birmingham Unitarian Church, concert site for many nomadic classical music groups.

Applegate calls the Grieg piece "tuneful and possibly the most exciting" music for string quartet ever written.

Not so small praise from a 12-year veteran of the DSO who has performed pieces by all the major classical composers.

Expanding chamber

Over the years, the Lyric Chamber Ensemble has continually shown innovative flair in expanding the

Modem inscription: In many of his works, Jeffrey Abt balances a high precision with a subtle symbolism, such as in his painting, "Mortar/Mortar."

What: "Jeffrey Abt: Paintings and Drawings"
When: Through Saturday, April 4
Where: Cary Gallery, 226 Walnut Blvd., Rochester; (248) 651-3656
Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

need of rearrangement. That may sound paradoxical, but living with contradictions seems to be endemic to the modern condition.

For instance, in his painting, "Some Broken Things," a folding chair with a broken leg hovers over what appears to have been a Star of David symbol before it, too, came undone.

Abt, who was inspired for his latest series of work by his travels to Israel and the northern Sinai, seems to imply that faith is as precarious as a three-legged chair.

In subtle details in his drawings and paintings, Abt brings the viewer into a world of readily identifiable objects where all is not as it seems.

The neatly arranged corridors of a museum offers a mesmerizing pattern and symmetrical composition in "The Order of Things."

But in the foreground of the painting, Abt places a camera on a tripod with a neon yellow chord running from the flash to a wall circuit. Photographing art? That does seem to be missing the point.

A hodge podge of personal items, including false teeth and bifocals lie atop a table in "Mortar/Mortar."

In the background, an artist has apparently been uninspired to work on a canvas without a trace of paint. Abt raises a striking question: What part of ourselves do we pour into our work?

And more importantly, what part of ourselves do we leave behind?

According to Alan Cary, owner of Cary Gallery, Abt calls his style "poetic representation." That may be another way of describing Abt's combination of an engineer's attention to detail and an artist's longing for metaphysical explanations.

Apparently, Abt studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem have infused his

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