

Tomkow creates a place for hope

A broad smile comes easily to Gwen Tomkow.

What would you expect from a woman whose swirling watercolor paintings and serene landscapes of northern Michigan have been called "happy Van Gogh's."

If people are distinguished by how they walk and talk, Tomkow of Farmington Hills is a perpetual emotional wave.

Her intent isn't to merely create dreamily pleasant compositions. She aims to create an inhabitable place. "I want to give a peaceful experience (in my painting)," she said.

In the past several years, her work has been featured by *Watercolor USA*, and the annual hard-bound book "Splash," which spotlights the top 100 contemporary American watercolor artists.

Through early May, Tomkow's watercolors will be exhibited along the walls at Farmington Hills City Hall.

Reverie and depth

Tomkow's delightful depictions of orchards, shorelines, sunsets and the harvest moon appear as cool compresses for an agitated mind or a disheveled heart.

And yes, her repertoire of images includes Van Gogh's haystacks and sunflowers.

But beneath the reverie-inducing landscapes, there's a melancholic current.

Typically painting from memory rather than photographic reference, Tomkow's swirling hues are born from a stark realization: peace grows from strife, and pleasure is on the other side of pain.

She has a simple explanation.

"Part of being an only child is finding your own happy world," said Tomkow.

And part of growing up without siblings, she said, was always trying to please, especially when both parents were alcoholics. "You can't go on blaming other people for where you're at in your life. Sooner or later, you have to get over the things that happened when you were a kid."

For Tomkow, that meant overcoming her father's violent outbursts, and her mother's emotional meanderings.

For years, Tomkow put her childhood into an emotional folder and filed it away.

Until, she realized, painting was her salvation.

Sense of balance

In the mid 1970s, at an age when her friends were going through midlife crises, Tomkow was facing a life-threatening brain tumor.

"I made a decision right then to devote my life to my art," she said.

For the last two decades, she's traveled often to northwestern Michigan, recreating the sandy coastline and the endless rows of cherry trees.

Tomkow's rush of yellows, violets, reds and blues are not so much compositions to induce an escape from reality as much as to foster a sense of balance.

Working at a Van Gogh-like pace, she composes her watercolor paintings rapidly, often completing a "rough painting" in hours, then taking

Please see CONVERSATIONS, C2



Ambassador of glass: Ferdinand Hampson, owner and director of Habatat Galleries has been in the forefront of the international glass movement. The annual Invitational at Habatat is the oldest and largest in the world.

FRAGILE SENSIBILITIES

International Glass Invitational explores traditional, innovative forms

Last year, Ferdinand Hampson and his staff at Habatat Galleries traveled to Mexico City for the opening of a highly anticipated exhibit at the Tamayo Museum.

Armed guards stood at the entrances. Apparently, there was a need to ensure that the long lines of people waiting outside wouldn't overrun the place named for one of Mexico's most famous 20th century painters, Rufino Tamayo.

Surely, it was just another case of the masses flocking to see the works of Monet, Renoir, Matisse or Picasso. Not quite.

Would you believe an international glass exhibit south of the border? That exhibit, curated by Hampson of West Bloomfield, is yet another example of how he — as much as anyone in the world — has worked to elevate glass sculpture into an internationally accepted fine art.

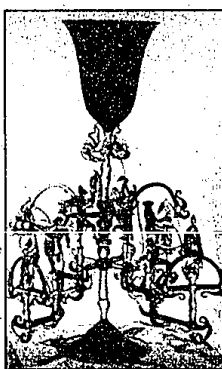
If there are doubters about the appeal of one of the world's oldest transparent materials, this month's 26th Annual International Glass Invitational at Hampson's Habatat Galleries in downtown Pontiac gives new meaning to "Fragile Handle With Care."

"For years 'glass' was somewhere between modern art and the decorative arts," said Hampson. "It always fell between the cracks."

Today, the cracks are barely noticeable.

"We carry on a dual continuum," said Hampson. "We document the history of glass, and we part the broader history of contemporary art."

The Invitational is the much-antic-



Anatomy lessons: The varied figurine sculptures of Italian artist Lucio Bubacco reflects a distinctive European style representing a delicate allegory.

ipated showcase exhibit that coincides with Michigan Glass Month, now in its 18th year.

To commemorate the artistic possibilities of glass, there are a range of special exhibits at galleries and museums throughout the region.

Many of the exhibits feature glass

blowing, stained glass, fused, painted and mosaic glass works. The commemorative exhibits are held from downtown to the northern suburbs, and from Toledo to Muskegon.

But without a doubt, Habatat's international feast featuring the works of 65 highly distinctive artists is the fertile furnace from which all other glass exhibits are derived.

Since moving to Pontiac from Southfield four years ago, Habatat has filled its expansive two-floor gallery with the work of a Who's Who of the glass artistry world.

Habatat boasts the largest — and most diverse — inventory of glass art in the world.

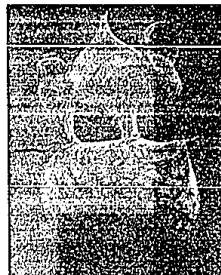
With locations in Chicago and Boca Raton along with arranging exhibits in Europe and Asia, Habatat is considered an ambassador of the art-form, said Hampson.

This year's Invitational has attracted the work of internationally renowned artists Dale Chihuly, Stanislaw Libensky, Lucio Bubacco, William Morris, Michael Pavlik and Mary Shaffer.

In abstract, geometric, figurative and Dali-like juxtapositions, these artists, in particular, demonstrate the versatility of a medium that resonates with a peculiar relevance in the age of virtual reality, appropriation and eclecticism.

"Fifteen years ago, every piece was blown," said Hampson. "But today, you can see that the work is more thought out and differentiated. The artists are getting stronger and more

Please see GLASS, C2



Primitive minimal: William Morris' blown glass sculptural series of bulls present myriad similarities between glass and other mediums.



Balanced: "Pillared" by Herb Babcock is a sculpture of glass, steel and stone demonstrates the mixed-media possibilities.

What: "26th Annual Invitational," a survey of international glass artistry of 65 of artists from 17 countries

When: Through May 3

Where: Habatat Galleries, 7 N. Saginaw, Pontiac, (248) 333-2050

Hours: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, noon-5 p.m. Sunday, excluding Easter.

Michigan Glass Month Activities

■ "Ancient Glass: Reign of the Glass Lady," Donna Jacobs Gallery, 514 N. Old Woodward Avenue, Birmingham, (248) 540-1000.

Through Sunday, May 3.

■ "The Art of Accretions: Contemporary Glass from Collections in the Jewish Community," Jewish Community Center, 6500 W. Maple Road, West Bloomfield, (248) 661-7041.

Through Thursday, May 14.

■ Original works by Michigan artists Harry Boyer, John Carney, Furnace Hot Glass, George Jewell, Bonnie Merrill and others, Artium Center Gallery, 109 N. Center, Northville, (248) 380-0470. Through April 30.

■ "Masterworks of Contemporary Glass," Creative Arts Center, 47 Williams Street, Pontiac, (248) 333-7849. Through Sunday, April 20.

■ "Interpretations in Glass," featuring work by Tom McGilchrist, Stephen Hoffer and Clay McCas, Uzzell Gallery, 7 N. Saginaw, Pontiac, (248) 332-5257. Through May 30.

■ "A Glass Act '96," Gallery FunctionArt, 21 H. Saginaw, Pontiac, (248) 333-0333.

Through Sunday, May 31.

■ "North of the Border: Emerging and Established Canadian," Anana Gallery, 119 S. Main Street, Royal Oak, (248) 545-6810. Through Thursday, April 30.

■ "Glass and Its Fascination," Carol James Gallery, 301 S. Main, Royal Oak, (248) 541-0210. Through Saturday, May 2.

EXHIBITION

Revealing the lasting presence behind a neglected urban landscape

A compelling urban landscape for Stephen Magsig should offer a sense of stability and order.

In an age of suburban sprawl, rapid commercial change and unraveling social order, a simple question comes to mind: Where's stability hiding?

In an impressive array of paintings, "Street Scenes," opening Thursday at the Lemberg Gallery in Birmingham, Magsig presents a mosaic of doorways, austere columns of historic buildings, street-level storefronts, vacant high rises, dilapidated tenements and trendy hotels.

Not exactly the first thing that comes to mind when searching for a thread of continuity in the quiltwork of history. But look again — and again.

At first glance Magsig's oil paintings resemble the haunting urban undertones of Edward Hopper, one of the greatest American realist painters of the century.

But the visions in "Street Scenes" are quite particular in defining a familiar place and time — contemporary Detroit.

"Whereas most people see the dilapidation of buildings, Stephen sees the details of city's past," said Darlene Carroll, director

What: "Street Scenes: New Paintings by Stephen Magsig"

When: Opening 6 p.m. Thursday, April 9. Exhibit runs through Saturday, May 9.

Where: Lemberg Gallery, 538 N. Old Woodward Avenue, Birmingham, (248) 542-6623

Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

of the Lemberg Gallery.

"He sees his paintings as portraits of buildings," she said.

Indeed, Magsig's paintings are as realistic as they are romantic. And though Magsig is ambivalent about comparisons to Hopper, he does share the great realist's vision to define the soulfulness of a milieu without slipping into sloppy social politics.

"Hopper had an empathy for his subjects," said Magsig of Ferndale. "There doesn't seem to be enough compassion in society. I'm interested in capturing a flow and place without looking past what's there."

In the past two years, Magsig, 51, has gone from painting high rises, to a painter on the rise.

He's had two shows in New York City, an exhibit in Boston and a 10-year retrospective last January at the Meadowbrook

Gallery at Oakland University.

In addition, Magsig's commission work has increased steadily, including the recent assignments from a major law firm, and a commission from General Motors to paint their world headquarters on West Grand Boulevard.

"Stephen is a determined and disciplined painter," said Carroll. "He's definitely breaking out."

Emotional kinship

A week before the opening of "Street Scenes," Magsig was putting the finishing touches on a few of the 22 paintings in the show.

On most days, Magsig works from early evening until midnight. Usually after he completes his work as an illustrator for Slidmore & Inc.

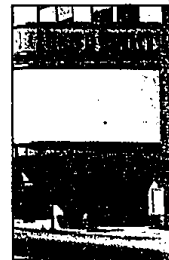
Sitting in his second-floor studio along Woodward Avenue in Ferndale, Magsig isn't too impressed that he's located along the historic stretch of road that led many people away from Detroit.

The notion of documenting the sprawling

Please see LANDSCAPE, C2



Vistas: The shoreline of northern Michigan is among the many familiar images in Gwen Tomkow's watercolors.



Urban soul: "United Artists," an oil on linen, is one of 22 paintings by Stephen Magsig in an exhibit rooted in the urban experience.