

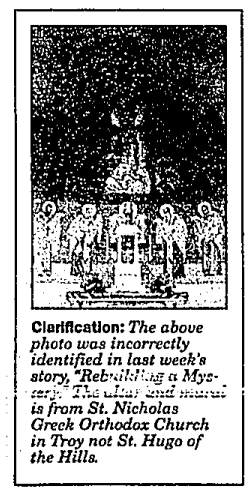
Overcoming the stigma of "being from Detroit"

Not many people know the local art scene as well as Hope Palmer. On average, Palmer visits the studios of 15-20 artists per month. That's 180-240 visits per year. Never knew that there were that many artists in metro Detroit? You're probably not alone. A self-described "conduit" for gallery owners and collectors, Palmer is a talent scout on a mission. "Detroit has gotten some bad press," she said. "There's still a stigma out there. The big name critics just look at what's going on in LA or New York. Detroit is well-kept secret." And now, Palmer figures, is as good a time as any to stop whispering to ourselves and tell the rest of the world what many of us have known for years. Notown not only moves to its own gritty rhythm, but the Midwestern work ethic doesn't take a back seat to either the west or east coast. Along with Stanley Rosenthal, Palmer has curated "Born in the BBAA," an exhibit of nine artists affiliated with the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, now known as the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center.

**Common aesthetic?** While the eclectic exhibit doesn't present any cutting-edge art, it does offer an intriguing overview of some of the area's most talented artists. "The common characteristic in the exhibit is that these artists have mastered their materials," said Palmer. "All of the artists have been out in the field for 10-15 years. They're all represented by local galleries, and many have had one person shows." Looking for a common aesthetic, according to Palmer, overhadows the diversity of artists. At one time, there was a definable "Detroit aesthetic" associated with the Cass Corridor artists who lived just off the Wayne State campus in the 1960s, said Palmer. But that might have been mostly hype, and a simplistic belief that just because artists lived in the name metropolis they shared sensibilities. Like artists in the broader art world, the nine artists in "Born in the BBAA" reflect the neo-modernist approach to mix and match styles, from realism to abstract expressionism.

**What's in a name?** The name change at the former BBAA is a better indication of its mission. A broader connotation comes with the change from an "art association" to an "art center." In recent months, the art center has

Please see BBAA, C2



Clarification: The above photo was incorrectly identified in last week's story. "Rebuilding a Mycenaean" is from St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in Troy not St. Hugo of the Hills.

ART for the sake of community



Glorious: "Pattern Dancing," a painting by Susan Fisher.

**Networking: The Farmington Festival of the Arts has drawn on the support of residents, government and business. Volunteers include Danguole Jurgutis, (left to right), Nan Reid, Randy Patterson, Sally LePla-Perry, Kathleen Erngren, Dixie Doerr and Marvel Steiger.**



Grassroots momentum behind Farmington Festival of the Arts



**Finding your way** "Lakeshore Path," an acrylic by Danguole Jurgutis, recently named the Farmington area's artist-in-residence for 1998.

**S**omehow, Nanette Reid's two kids and husband haven't complained. At least, not too loudly. Not even when Reid spent five hours a day to help organize last fall's Festival of the Arts in Farmington. And not these days, entering the final, hectic stretch before the opening of the eighth-day Festival of the Arts, which she co-chairs. Going about her business as she clutches a thick notebook filled with the names of contacts and volunteers, Reid embodies the never-say-die attitude of today's most dogged arts advocates. "Nan has all of our phone numbers," said Sally LePla-Perry, cultural arts coordinator for Farmington-Farmington Hills. "Once you're in her book, watch out." A dancer by choice, and an advocate by necessity, Reid is one of the many volunteers who are transforming the identity of Farmington-Farmington Hills from a blissful suburb with a rolling landscape into a locale of thousands of citizen-artists. The idea may sound utopian, but it is clearly rooted in democratic yearnings. "My government is me," said Reid. "If there aren't people coming together along the way, (the arts) aren't going to go anywhere." Reid only needs to check her perpetually growing Rolodex. She's hardly alone.

**Sense of ownership** As chair of the Farmington Artist Club's spring exhibit last year, Kathleen Erngren of Livonia realized that organization skills are a prerequisite for sustaining art in the community. Erngren is the other co-chair of the Festival of the Arts. "I just sort of fell into these posi-

Please see FESTIVAL, C2

- What:** "Farmington Festival of the Arts," presented by the Farmington Community Arts Council  
**When:** Saturday, April 25 - Sunday, May 3  
**Where:** William M. Costick Activities Center, 28600 Eleven Mile Road, (east of Mid-dlebet Road) Farmington.
- Program:**
- **Saturday, April 25**
    - 8:15 p.m. - "Starry Night," Gala Preview, featuring the Matt Michaels Jazz Trio
    - **Sunday, April 26 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m.)**
      - 1:45-5 p.m. - Farmington Musicale Presentation
      - 2 p.m. - Arts Commission Ceremony, featuring award winners
      - 3-5 p.m. Festival Exhibits Open
    - **Monday, April 27 (10 a.m. to 8 p.m.)**
      - 11 a.m. - Embroiderers' Guild Demonstration
      - 2 p.m. - Ridgewriters' "Poetry, Prose and Tea"
    - 7 p.m. - Farmington Musicale Presentation
  - **Tuesday, April 28 (10 a.m. to 6 p.m.)**
    - 10:30 a.m. - Farmington Artist Club Demonstrations
    - 11 a.m. - Embroiderers' Guild Demonstration
    - 1:30 a.m. - Our Lady of Sorrows Youth Choirs
    - 12 p.m. - Hittale Harmony
    - 7 p.m. - Farmington Community Band Clarinet Choir
  - **Wednesday, April 29 (10 a.m. to 6 p.m.)**
    - 10:30 a.m. - Farmington Artist Club Demonstrations, East M.S. Vocal & Instrumental Ensemble
    - 11 a.m. - Embroiderers' Guild Demonstration
    - 12:45 p.m. - North Farmington HS Steel Drum Band
    - 4:30 p.m. - Chamber of Commerce "Mixer," Farmington Musicale Presentation
  - 6 p.m. - 5Cool Jazz
  - 7 p.m. - 5Cool Jazz Prime
- **Thursday, April 30 (11 a.m. to 8 p.m.)**
  - 11 a.m. - Embroiderers' Guild Demonstration, Farmington Artist Club Demonstrations
  - 12 p.m. - Luncheon for Seniors
  - 1 p.m. - Harrison HS Jazz/Dance Band
  - 7 p.m. - Farmington Community Band Flute Ensemble
- **Friday, May 1 (11 a.m. - 8 p.m.)**
  - 2 p.m. - Embroiderers' Guild Demonstration
  - 7:30 p.m. - Detroit Ballet - "Apollo" and Repertoire
- **Saturday, May 2 (11 a.m. to 8 p.m.)**
  - 10 a.m. - "Building the Arts from the Grassroots," a roundtable discussion with regional art associations, sponsored by the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers
- **Sunday, May 3 (11 a.m. - 5 p.m.)**
  - 3 p.m. - Farmington Community Band & Chorus

Pilobolus' moving statues defy gravity

Placed in the tradition of modern dance, Pilobolus Dance Theatre is a defiant embryo, more content with continually reinventing itself than upholding any heritage. Building, balancing, linking and unfolding the bodies of its six-member troupe into flesh-and-blood sculptures, Pilobolus is a Samuel Beckett play set to evocative choreography. The Connecticut-based dance theater named after a fungus - albeit a fun-loving mushroom that grows in barnyards - will perform Friday-Sunday, April 24-26, at Music Hall in Detroit. Expect an unusual assortment of poses and bizarre collective gestures, such as three standing dancers each extending a leg to hold up another dancer who lies across their feet. Or a crouching dancer who has two other dancers wrapped around his torso and back. Or how about five dancers stacked on top of each other, each striking the pose of "The Thinker." Not quite the choreography of George Balanchine, Martha Graham or Paul Taylor. But filled with the raw, contemporary energy of the avant-garde. "Modern dance is young, maybe 75 years," said Jonathan Wolken, a founding member of Pilobolus. "For a third of that time we've been around pushing the boundaries."

Performing without a set, the well-chiseled dancers appear in their quasi-birthday suits playing as if human bodies were weightless rubber dolls.

In many ways, Pilobolus offers artful

gymnastics with a slow-motion composition of a sculptor, said Wolken. Defying gravity seems to be the only theme linking their varied dances. Well, maybe it's not quite dancing. Nor the type of dramatic expression that's easily comprehensible.

But that's apparently the point. "We're intentionally ambiguous," said Wolken. "We're abstract, theatrical, pregnant with meaning, but not specific in any meaning. Our hallmark is our sense of humor."

Apparently, audiences have picked up on Pilobolus' heterogeneous approach and comic ambiguity.

Over the last decade when many dance companies have struggled to attract audiences, Pilobolus has steadily increased its popularity.

And with dance theater companies such as Momix Inc. and Peter Fucci performing a strikingly similar style, Pilobolus may be unintentionally establishing a tradition.

"I think we have dropped some of our spores," said Wolken.



Human sculpture: Pilobolus dancers blend the avant-garde with the bizarre.

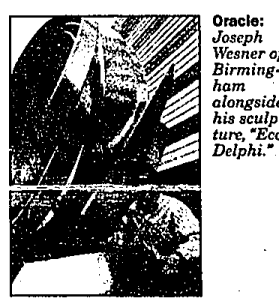
PUBLIC ART

Just a regular guy constructs modern-day monument to Delphi

Joseph Wesner may be most recognized as a highly talented abstract sculptor, but his worldly travels are equally impressive - not to mention otherworldly. He appears simultaneously as an intellectual, a floppy hair bohemian, and the consummate educator. (Wesner of Birmingham is chair of the sculpture department at the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit.) After actively, he has shown the minutia of the sculptural process and art history, then slip into "regular guy speak," talking about the Red Wings, growing up in Philly and making things with his hands. And as his latest commissioned sculpture shows, he's neither bound by geography nor history.

A half a planet and several millennia away from the fabled shrine of Delphi in ancient Greece, Wesner has interpreted a distinctively contemporary oracle. He's erected his stainless steel response at - where else? - the courtyard of Delphi World Headquarters. Located - where else? - in Troy, a named attached to the allegory of the Trojan War, and the modern-day capital of the automobile industry. **Corporate allegory** Wesner's 12-foot-high stainless steel swirl of organic motion, "Eco," is as uniquely modern as the ancient oracles were transcendent and mysterious. "Yeah, I think it's a corporate alle-

gory," he said. "There's a narrative (represented in the sculpture) about how at the end of the day, something has been made, something physical that has soul in it." A grand opening was held last fall to commemorate Wesner's work along with the sculpture of Heather McGill, chair of the sculpture department at the Cranbrook Academy of Art. McGill's sculpture of the intersecting apheres symbolizing Delphi's worldwide presence hangs from the high ceilings in the building's lobby. Developing the sculpture from idea to finished form, according to Wesner, was far from a bureaucratic



Oracle: Joseph Wesner of Birmingham alongside his sculpture, "Eco Delphi."

Please see DELPHI, C2