

Catchy melody of art, icons and '90s commerce

"What a long, strange trip it's been,"
Lyrics from "Truckin'."
— Grateful Dead

Of course, maybe, just maybe, the long, strange trip hasn't ended. Actually, it's far from over. Time has been rewired.

And if you need any convincing, consider this week's artwork exhibit of John Lennon, Miles Davis and Jerry Garcia at the Michigan Ballroom in Ann Arbor. (See related Ann Arbor Art Fair chart for details.)

OK, dead artists often have exhibits. Monet, Picasso and Leger come to mind. But Lennon, Davis and Garcia were pop and jazz music icons. Their great works are recorded on CDs, right? Maybe.

Did these great songwriters and musicians also make great works of visual art during their lives?

Or is the exhibit about something else entirely?

Ethereal addresses

The mass-marketing of deceased pop icons raises interesting issues about art, commerce and the shallowness of a culture where artists are considered pseudo heroes for once displaying a stylish defiance.

Ironically, what may have been considered cutting-edge, or shockingly inventive about these artists, now passes as "establishment cool."

Could the same supplies who today boast about their diversified stock portfolios relate to Lennon's right-consciousness, Davis' sound of overcoming static musical forms, or Garcia's sense of alienation?

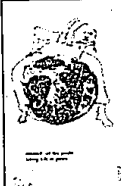
While few other trios of musician-artists could attract such a diverse popular audience, there's more of a curiosity than critical acclaim about their visual artwork.

What made the music of Lennon, Davis and Garcia so compelling was the honesty and unique personalities of the messengers.

In the vapid age of celebrity, these musicians seemed like the real thing — immensely talented and visionary. (Perhaps Lennon and Davis more than Garcia. Sorry, Deadheads.)

They railed against the crass commercialism of labels and agelessness. But in the pervasive market mentality of the 1990s, even these seminal musical artists with ethereal addresses can't escape the stark reality: art and commerce are inseparable.

Visionary:
Words from the peace anthem "Imagine" are written below John Lennon's trademark line drawing.



Playin' along

Obviously, these aren't your typical amateur visual artists. Lennon, Davis and Garcia's power of expression aren't contained to the aural realm. Respectively, their artworks reflect the depth and resonance of their music.

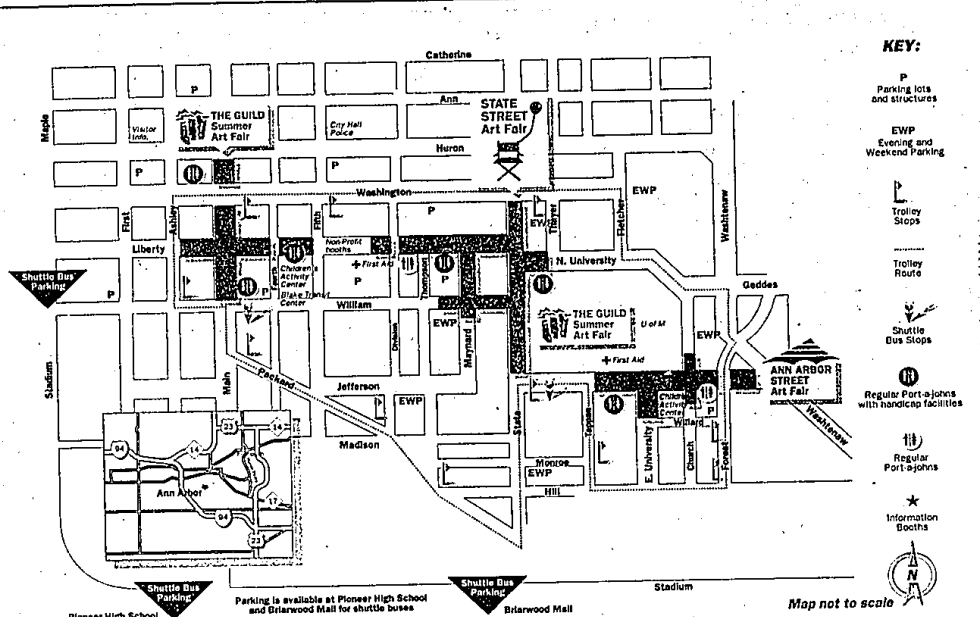
Lennon's line drawings are simple, sentimental, but unflinchingly candid. Davis free-floating forms depict an artist capable of deconstructing, then reconstructing a melody. And Garcia's cathartic rush of lines and colors reveal a common man's hedonistic sensibility.

But as long as Lennon's self-portrait appears in his drawings and Davis and Garcia sign their paintings, it's unlikely that their collective

Please see 10045, C2



Free form: Floating, spontaneous shapes distinguish Miles Davis' music and fine art.



Art fairs attract national audience

The ability to draw visitors from around the country is one of the reasons Ed Risak believes he's successful at the Ann Arbor Art Fairs. A Birmingham Groves High School graduate, Risak keeps coming back to exhibit his raku vessels in the Ann Arbor fairs every July for one reason — money. It's been profitable for the Marquette clay artist since the early 1970s. Risak's exhibited in all

three of the three fairs which comprise one of the largest and most respected art fairs in the country.

"It's the best show for me every year," said Risak, who will exhibit his work in 10 retail and one wholesale show this year. "Maybe it's because I've built up a following over the years, but Ann Arbor's the biggest. More people come to Ann Arbor from all over than to any other show in the country."

Art fairs sponsorship director Carol Marvin-Buchel thinks Risak is typical of the more than 1,100 artists (see accompanying story) showing their works July 15-18.

"The Ann Arbor Art Fairs generate more revenue for artists than any other event," said Marvin-Buchel, a Plymouth resident. "With all the talk about arts initiatives and supporting artists, this event puts money in the artists' pockets."

Shary Brown is hoping not only to make the fairs more profitable for artists but more enjoyable for the expected 500,000 visitors. This is Brown's first year as executive director of the Ann Arbor Street Fair, the oldest of the three fairs. Signage to direct visitors to the 26 blocks of paintings, pottery,



Raku Jewel: This vessel by Ed Risak (booth 207 North University) is one of the thousands of works on exhibit at the Ann Arbor Art Fairs.

photography, sculpture, wood, glass, fiber, folk art, toys, entertainment, and children's activities will improve accessibility to the sights and sounds of the nationally recognized arts extravaganza.

The cash and in-kind services donated to the Ann Arbor Art Fairs will be used to improve and strengthen the fairs, according to Marvin-Buchel of Pop Culture Media.

One of the official sponsors, Dr. Ballard Veterinarian's Recipes, and the fairs planning committee is asking that visitors attending the Ann Arbor Art Fairs leave their dogs at home because of the heat and crowds. Instead, organizers suggest you stop by Dr. Ballard's tent (Liberty and Division) for a free gift to take home to your dog.

Also for the first time, the Ann Arbor Area Chamber of Commerce is sponsoring an Art Fairs Gala Celebration with live music and hors d'oeuvres to kick off Art Fair Week 6:30-8:30 p.m. Monday, July 13 at the Michigan League. Tickets are \$25 per person and available by calling (734) 214-0104.

Ann Arbor Street Fair

The Ann Arbor Art Fairs are three separate art fairs in one, each showcasing a diversity of media and styles. Founded 39 years ago by a group of arts supporters as a special activity for annual sidewalk sales, the Ann Arbor Street Fair features 193 artists from 38 states, Canada, England and Washington, D.C.

Please see ART FAIRS, C2

ARTIST PROFILE

Future of glass art 'crystal clear' for Megdall

For a dazzling medium that appears so polished and refined, sculpting glass is the ultimate instinctive art.

Starting into a molten-hot furnace, glass artist Stan Megdall would add "primitive," too.

With beaded rows of avent ching to his forehead and a cotton shirt drenched in perspiration, Megdall dips the end of a long hollow pole into the bottom of the furnace where several rocks of glass have liquefied. A process, he notes, that has been around for centuries.

Like the sense of balance in his glass sculptures, Megdall moves with an efficient sense of purpose in his sweltering studio, located a few yards away from his home in a sylvan area

of West Bloomfield. For the last six years, Megdall has been a one-person creative dynamo. His product line of glass flowers, perfume bottles, vases and bowls developed for gift galleries and art fairs will be displayed at the Ann Arbor Street Art Fair, held this Wednesday through Saturday.

Proper timing

Megdall estimates that he has less than a minute-and-a-half to shape, add color or blow into the long pipe holding a gooey liquid glass bubble at its end.

Take too long and the glass will harden. Hurry and the glass will drip like fiery honey. Unlike other forms of sculpting, proper timing in glass sculpture is the difference between completing a finished piece of art, and trying to piece together broken bits of ice with a blowtorch.

Please see MEGDALL, C2

Fragile balance: Sculptor Stan Megdall examines the free-form shape of a glass bowl as it slowly cools.



What: Glass sculpture and functional art by Stan Megdall
Where: State Street Area Art Fair
Booth: 114 North University
When: Wednesday-Saturday, July 15-18