

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

## Titanic survivor heads home with guitar in hand

Sean McCourt has returned from another audition. And he's not talking. Not about the audition, at least.

"I'm kind of superstitious," he said. "There's a lot of disappointment in this business."

The 1989 Birmingham LaSalle High School grad, who won critical notice for his performance on Broadway in "Titanic" two years ago, knows the unspoken rule among thespians: "Never talk about a role until you've gotten the part."

While the sirens blaring from the New York City streets can be heard in the background, he sits in his apartment, talking on the phone and barely raising his voice.

This isn't a guy who gets flustered easily.



**Cruelin':** Actor/composer Sean McCourt has written music for a new film.

McCourt changes roles with nearly slight-of-hand ease. In a couple of hours, he'll strum and pick his guitar at a nearby club. On Tuesday, he'll head west — back home — for a performance of songs from his recent CD, "Stick Figures Skating," at The Ark in Ann Arbor.

### Song of diversity

From his New York home, McCourt runs a recording studio. He records demos for musicians looking to catch on with a label.

Working as a sound engineer is another way to pay the bills, along with searching for roles on stage and film.

"Diversity is my strongest weapon in making a living," said McCourt. "Many people who act can sing, too. Fewer of them can write music." Besides his latest CD, McCourt's music can be heard in the soundtrack of "Snow Days," an independent film that stars Bernadette Peters.

Many of the songs are "romantic singalongs."

The film has been entered in the Sundance Film Festival. If it gains wide distribution, McCourt expects that he, too, will receive wider recognition for his songwriting.

### Fingers crossed

After he left the cast of "Titanic," McCourt played Woody Guthrie in a musical about the folk singer.

"Playing Woody Guthrie helped me find where my heart was," said McCourt. "I knew I had to follow writing music."

While Guthrie's songs are more populist and political, McCourt's compositions also strive to tell stories and create characters in the Guthrie tradition.

But clearly, the late 1990s music industry is far removed from Guthrie's dust bowl, Depression-era imagery.

"Today's music market is changing rapidly," said McCourt, who not only writes, performs and records his music, but also serves as promoter and chief marketer.

"Being from a theatre background has made me used to rejection," he said. "You learn to just keep prodding along."

Based on his acting, singing and writing ability, the day will soon arrive when McCourt will be able to toss away superstitions.

Until then, it can't do any harm to keep his fingers crossed, and keep mum about his next role.

## Exhibit focuses on Jewish, Arab, Druze artists promoting peaceful coexistence

BY FRANK PROVENZANO  
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They came in droves to what they called the Promised Land. They came by rail. They came by sea. And Israeli artist Zivit Sharabi recalled that her grandfather even walked all the way from Yemen to a land that he beloved was surely calling his name across the Rub al Khali desert.

But 51 years after the state of Israel was founded, the Promised Land has been anything but a place to find "peace on earth."

Two years ago, Israeli artists figured they could accomplish through their art what governments failed to gain by treaty. Jewish, Arab and Druze artists living in Israeli held a collective exhibit of their works, entitled "Identity, Thoughts and Visions."

In a series of paintings, drawings, photographs and mixed-media works, 22 artists living in Israel communicated their longing for peace and community. For the most part, only their names attached to the works offered any clue to their ethnicity.

An expanded version of the exhibit is making its North American debut at the Janice Charach Epstein Center of Metropolitan Detroit, 6000 W. Maple Road, West Bloomfield.

"I hope the exhibit is a symbol of (Jews and Arabs) working together," said Sylvia Nelson, director of the Janice Charach Epstein Gallery.

"With how quickly messages of hate can be spread on the Internet, you don't want to forget about those who are working for peace."

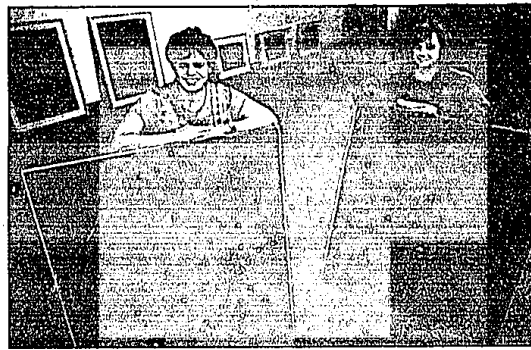
In the wake of the hate-inspired shooting at a Jewish Daycare Center in Los Angeles, the question of how people can get along peacefully — and accept cultural differences — has not only expanded beyond the Middle East, but resonates with a sense of urgency.

**Personal relationships**  
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**Tolerance:** Natouf Camel's painting depicts the common religious symbols in Israel.

# Soul to Soul



**Shared vision:** Israeli artist Zivit Sharabi, left, and Cynthia Phillips, project coordinator, prepare for the opening of "Identity, Thought and Vision." Sharabi's portraits of Third World women are among the featured paintings in the exhibit.

STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HOFFMEYER

**What:** "Identity, Thought and Vision: Discussions with Jewish, Arab, and Druze Israeli Artists," a documentary film and fine art exhibit.  
**When:** Through Tuesday, Oct. 19  
**Where:** Janice Charach Epstein Museum Gallery, Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit, 6000 W. Maple Road, West Bloomfield  
**Hours:** 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Wednesday; 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday. For information, call (248) 661-7641.

"All we're showing is that when you have a personal relationship with someone, it's hard to hate them."

Ironically, in the country along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea that is the holy land for Jews, Christians and Muslims, the precepts of religion have too often been perverted pretexts for war. Existence for one group has often come at the expense of the other.

Initially, coexistence in the Middle East was met with the type of coolness that distinguished the simmering debate between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union. In Israel, where 95 percent of citizens vote, there is a growing attitude that peace must come from the grassroots, said Sharabi.

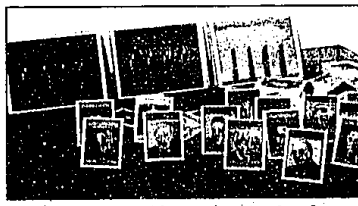
"Coexistence is between people — soul to soul — not between governments," she said.

### Push/pull of culture

In comparison to American multiculturalism, Israeli culture also represents a melting pot on a smaller scale. While life in Israel revolves around the traditions of Judaism, the parliamentary government is intended to provide for democratic representation of all citizens, Jewish and non Jewish, including Arabs and Druze.

The apparent paradox is how do these disparate subcultures maintain their ethnic heritage while coexisting in one society?

Please see SOUL, C2



**Deflated:** Anton Beiderman's portraits of past and present Israeli leaders are placed on the floor in the Janice Charach Epstein Gallery.

## EXHIBITION

# Paint Creek Center celebrates Michigan artists

BY ALICE RHEIN  
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The Paint Creek Center for the Arts in Rochester is best known for its fall Art & Apples Festival, but its annual Celebrate Michigan Artists exhibit continues to give its impressive reputation among collectors and artists statewide.

The exhibition, which opened Friday, began in 1987 in observance of the state's 150th anniversary. In the last 12 years, the Celebrate Michigan Artists exhibit has evolved into the Paint Creek's most prestigious juried show.

The multimedia event is one way of showcasing the rich artistic talent throughout the state, said exhibition director John Cynur.

"Most of our other shows are subject-oriented. This one used to be just two-dimensional, but we've since added sculpture," he said.

John Woodward, who took first place in last year's exhibition for one of his popular sculpture heads, has a solo exhibit in the first-floor gallery, while the CMA exhibit is displayed in the upstairs gallery.

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**Heads up:** Artist John Woodward won first place in last year's Celebrate Michigan Artists exhibit. A solo exhibit of Woodward's sculptures is on display in the first-floor gallery at Paint Creek Center for the Arts.

said Woodward. "A lot of people like to buy art from regional artists."

Indeed, since last year's award Woodward has had many inquiries about his work.

Gallery owners and private collectors are among the visitors to CMA. "The exhibit definitely sets as a springboard," said Woodward.

"Collectors may purchase a piece and galleries can see multiple artists at once."

This year's juror, Jan van der Marck, curatorial consultant at the Detroit

Institute of Arts, chose 46 finalists from more than 300 entries and 57 Michigan communities.

Cynur said the picks are far-ranging and represent a variety of mediums, including watercolor, drawing, mixed-media and sculpture.

"Sometimes there are trends," said Cynur. "Over one-quarter of this show is photography, either color, black-and-white or digital."

**Winning themes**  
The work of this year's third place winner, Gene Meadows, falls into this category. Best known for his architectural photography, the Birmingham-based artist submitted two photographs from his "Living Study," a black-and-white photograph.

"I attempted to find scenes around the house of how we live," said Meadows. "The series takes architecture and gets more intimate, more mysterious."

Proceeds from "Dutchman" will help fund students' participation in the annual collegiate theater festival.

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Please see PAINT CREEK, C2

## Chilling play about racism set to burn on OU stage

BY FRANK PROVENZANO  
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In his Introduction to Theater course, Oakland University Professor Michael Gillespie used to include a short play on the list of mandatory readings for his students.

The short play, "Dutchman" by Amiri Baraka (formerly known as LeRoi Jones), was included because Gillespie contends that it's among the finest examples of the theater of provocation.

Performed for a three-night run beginning Thursday in the intimate Varner Studio, "Dutchman" will inevitably create an uneasy proximity to the ugliness of raw racism.

And that's exactly the point. No gloss. No politically correct hogwash. The play's defiant tone and chilling suggestion sounds a warning in the bloody street-fight for equal space.

"Unfortunately, it's as relevant today as it was when it was written in 1964," said Gillespie.

Written as a contemporary allegory that takes place on a big-city subway, "Dutchman" rubs away at the euphemisms about racism. Basically, the play centers on the conversation between a white woman and black man. Each reflects the playwright's interpretation of the prevailing attitudes of White and Black America of the early 1950s, at the onset of the black nationalist movement.

While most plays that aim at polemical righteousness rather than compelling drama often become dated, "Dutchman" continues to be a political lightning rod.

The play has the driving beat of stinging rap lyrics, but portrays the inflexible attitudes planted by racial intolerance.

It takes a balance of daring and edginess to pull off the play, and Gillespie believes that Angel Maclean and Euan Pritchett, who portray the play's central characters, evoke the playwright's provocative vision.

"When they gave a reading during one of our theater classes, the sparks were flying," said Gillespie. "It got pretty hot."

Maclean and Pritchett are considered two of the most acclaimed actors to graduate from the Oakland University theater program.

Maclean, a 1993 grad, performed in the national tour of "Last of the Red Hot Lovers" and "Play It Again Sam." She is a part-time instructor at OU.

Meanwhile, Pritchett won the highest award in 1997 from the American College Theatre Festival. He plans to move to New York City to begin his professional acting career.

Proceeds from "Dutchman" will help fund students' participation in the annual collegiate theater festival.