

Curator gets clock cleaned for art's sake

BY ALICE REHN
PIATT WHITE

When students from Cranbrook toured *Forgers of Metal: George Booth and his Patronage of Metalcraft at Cranbrook*, they had a few things to say to its curator, Collections Intern Sarah Schleuning.

"So you're the one who stole our clock. We never knew what time it is now," is what some of them say to me," said Schleuning, referring to the clock that has only been moved from the Cranbrook students' dining hall once since its installation in the 1920s.

But the graduate of New York's Parsons School of Design is no thief. In fact, Schleuning, who is at Cranbrook as part of a 10-month fellowship which will end this summer, is doing her part to aid in the conservation of some of Cranbrook's most beloved metalworks.

With a degree in the History of Decorative Arts, and a special interest in metal, the Oregon native seized the chance to work at Cranbrook, largely because of its long association with metalwork.

As part of her internship, Schleuning is required to curate two exhibits for the museum, and when she arrived last fall, she immediately delved into the metalwork.

It just so happened that conservation was needed on the badly rusted *Peacock Gates*, which are the entrance to Cranbrook School, and the *Arts and Crafts Clock*, designed by Oscar Bach, needed a good cleaning.

Schleuning saw this as an opportunity to display these items in an exhibit, along with archival letters and other metalworks from throughout the Cranbrook campus.

In the process, she's uncovered a lot of Cranbrook history that even the most devoted patrons may not know. Specifically, the show opens with letters of correspondence between George Booth, Cranbrook's founder, and metalmiths Frank Koralewsky, Oscar Bach and Samuel Yellin.

In one letter dated July 16, 1928, Bach, the fabricator of *Peacock Gates*, writes to tell Booth that the Elie Saarinen

What: Forgers of Metal: George Booth & his Patronage of Metalcraft at Cranbrook
Where: Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills
When: Through April 8
Related event: "The Gates of Cranbrook: A Walking Tour with Sarah Schleuning" is at 1 p.m. Sunday, April 1. Tour begins at the Art Museum. Weather permitting, call (248) 945-3320 after 11 a.m. on April 1 to confirm.
Information: 1-877-GO-CRAN-BROOK

design is much more elaborate than originally expected, and would require considerable overtime — thus the price could be no less than \$5,000. That's about equivalent to what a home in Detroit cost at about the same time.

"Booth knew what he was paying for," said Schleuning. "He was a metalsmith, as were many of the men in his family."

But Booth made his name in the newspaper business, and when he founded Cranbrook he set out to collect works by the finest metalsmiths in the field.

Included in the exhibit are drawings by Elie Saarinen and his son, Eero, of metalwork that was never realized. Schleuning counts these designs among her favorites in the exhibit.

"They were figuring out a master plan in these," she said. "You get into the whole meaning of what is a gate. Is it transparent? Is it a barrier? These are not meant to be univocal."

Indeed, a drive down Lone Pine Road reveals many of Cranbrook's most famous gates which were realized, including its latest installation by Gary Griffin, all which draw visitors in rather than serve as a barricade.

"Cranbrook is so beautiful that you tend to see it as a whole," said Schleuning. But when you take out one aspect, as she did with metalwork, you realize the exquisite quality.

In the *Peacock Gates*, for example, the accumulation of rust had caused etched details in the hinges to go unnoticed. It wasn't until the gates were brought into a new environment

that the original beauty came to life.

As part of her efforts as curator of the exhibit, Schleuning is offering a walking tour to interested patrons at 1 p.m. Sunday, April 1. The tour will begin at the Art Museum and travel along Lone Pine to view several of the gates and explain the history behind them.

"I hope that it will be informal in dialogue and will educate people," she said.

And as for other items in the exhibit, many are kept in places not viewed by the general public, but as Schleuning said, "Works of art like these deserve to be viewed and marveled by everyone."

Indeed, the clock, which is barely visible on its 30-foot perch above the dining hall, is an intricate ode to the arts and crafts tradition. Each of the 13 bronze-plated copper figures represent an aspect of arts and crafts, including glass-blowing, book-binding, and, of course, metal-smithing.

Another spectacular piece is a 1932 purchase from German native Koralewsky of a lock, key and hinge. The inscription in this intricate brass and steel master lock reads "When you do something-Do it," an assertion by the artist that a craftsman should put all his effort into his work.

Booth also purchased works from French artist Edgar Brandt. His *Les Roses*, which is on display in this exhibit, belongs to Brookside, the lower school of Cranbrook School.

And the amount of sharing from within the Cranbrook community is one of the things that Schleuning found to be both challenging and rewarding about this exhibit. Works from the archives, museum, schools and grounds are all merged together. "It incorporates all of what the community has to offer," said Schleuning, whose summer exhibition is going to be on the Sound Pieces of Harry Bertoin.

And if you haven't appreciated the Cranbrook grounds for quite some time, then perhaps *Forgers of Metal* will be the gateway to an eye-opening experience.



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