

# Galleries work at attracting buyers in this slow economy

BY LINDA ANN CHONIN  
STAFF WRITER

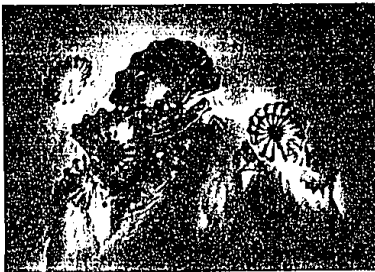
It's hard to judge to what degree the depressed economy is affecting local galleries. Like other businesses, galleries have been hurt by a decline in consumer spending. On any given day, foot traffic may be brisk or non-existent. But local galleries are holding on, and fighting back with a variety of business practices aimed at attracting buyers.

Ray Fleming created a relaxed atmosphere in the Robert Kidd Gallery he co-owns in Birmingham. Clients feel at home the minute they walk in and see the comfortable chairs and round coffee table strewn with magazines. After 25 years in the business, Fleming knows galleries can be intimidating. Not everyone can afford to walk in and buy an artwork. Monthly payment plans and the gallery's acceptance of credit cards make art easier to afford.

Fleming is constantly searching for new talent to keep prices down. A large-scale abstract by John Kennedy of Toronto was going for \$1,000 on a recent visit. That's reasonable for a painting capable of filling a wall all by itself.

"We're very busy. We have a wide range of art and prices," Fleming said. "What people are buying today is either in a less expensive range under \$12,000 or over \$20,000. People are nervous. They're buying more expensive work or younger artists for less and take a chance that they'll make a name for themselves."

"People are buying more expensive work like Larry Rivers for \$50,000 because they feel their money is more protected. They'll buy it because he's famous. It's confidence. People are spending more on established artists



A show by legendary glass artist Dale Chihuly is drawing crowds into Habitat Galleries in Birmingham and Royal Oak.

because it's a better investment. I advise people do not buy for investment. If it happens to go up in value, then it's a bonus. If they want to buy for investment, I point them to a Rivers or Bertoia."

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Over the past 10 years, Alan Cary has built a relationship with clients at his gallery in Rochester. He knows their tastes and, judging from the inventory at Cary Gallery, they're eclectic. Housed in a church built in 1818, the gallery offers paintings and drawings that range from abstract to realism.

"What's in the Closet?" is the current one-man show by Lee Doezema of Kalamazoo. Large-scale oils of clothes closet interiors and smaller paintings of shoes make viewers feel like they're sneaking a peak inside someone's private life.

"We've been selling well — oils and watercolors from \$800 to \$2,500," Cary said. "They're buying mostly because they like the art. People come as collectors. They like something they

see and buy it. There's quite a lot of building going on. We have a lot of artists that buy other artists' work. It slowed down after Sept. 11 for several months then began to pick up and has been steady ever since."

If anything Cindy Wolanuk's seen an increase in sales at Hermillage Gallery in Rochester. Since her husband Don opened the space eight years ago and have expanded twice. A November addition brought the total to 12,000 square feet.

"People aren't traveling, so they're spending money on their homes," Wolanuk said. "They're building large homes with lots of places to hang art and lots of nooks and crannies for smaller pieces. They're not collectors, but homeowners looking for things to decorate their walls. It seems to be living artists who are selling, not 19th century art, not \$20,000 pieces, but \$3,000 to \$5,000 pieces. Owners of smaller homes are coming in looking for something for their walls. Weekends are especially busy."

Business hasn't been quite

that good at Habitat Galleries in Birmingham, which specializes in glass. Owner Ferdinand Hampton knew he was taking a chance when he opened his newest location last August. Contemporary glass is still a relatively new medium. Forty years ago, glass was considered a craft, not a fine art form.

## SLOWER PACE

"We're moving at a much slower pace," said Hampton, president of Habitat Galleries.

"The cash flow sometimes makes me feel poor, but then projects come along. We've had 12 years of finding ways to make things work. We've been on a growth slowdown only a couple of times during that time. Last year we didn't do as well as the year before, yet we had the strongest January in our history."

"What we're doing is getting involved in large-scale commissions — an office building in Chicago, a large commission going on a ship in London, an outdoor commission in Atlanta. Exhibitions have been a bit spotty. We are affected by things."

Hampton isn't standing still, though. He's busy preparing for the annual International Glass Biennial in April. In the meantime, the West Bloomfield resident has booked legendary glass artist Dale Chihuly for a one-man show. Habitat Galleries began showing his work 28 years ago. The Royal Oak location features the room simulating a walk under the sea with glittering shell-like shapes. Birmingham spotlights Chihuly's Dragonfly Blue Persian Wall, definitely a high-end piece, as are the Chihuly chandeliers, which can go for \$165,000 each.

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## APOLLO

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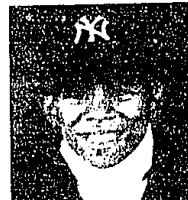
cately sound to it. And it speaks of all the things I have to say because I cover a wide range of poetry. I've got a big imagination," he said with a laugh, adding his favorite topics range from "poetry in general" to space, nature, water and beyond.

Hip-hop music is a major theme, as Desir, a senior at Eastern Michigan University, is a musician with his own band as well. "I guess you could say I'm a hip-hop poet," he said.

Writing helped the psychology major battle a bout with depression two-and-a-half years ago — and stuck. "It got a lot of the emotions out. It was a way to vent."

Reid, a singer, counts his idols as Michael Jackson and Boyz n the Hood. His presentation for Apollo was Wonder's *For Once in My Life*. "I love Motown. I'm from Motown, of course," he said with a laugh.

"(Motown music) is good and it truly originates from the



Christian Williams, aka Chris-Style, 10, a gospel rapper from Southfield will be performing at 'Evening at the Apollo on Tour.'

eddie stuff. My dad, of course, he's the big doo-wop guy. But I do my occasional R&B and hip-hop stuff too."

Reid already has a solid start in the pop music biz. For instance, last summer he opened up for Aaron Carter — Backstreet Boy Nick Carter's little brother — at Freedom Hill. It's also been told he has the "box hand look."

Does he also get the female screams? "Of course," said the Canton High School sophomore. "That's always fun to get."

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

**Muzzikás**  
Featuring Marta Selvestyen  
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Kalamazoo County Community Center  
"Marta Selvestyen, with her breathtaking vocals of Marta Selvestyen, has made Hungarian music one of the most popular folk styles in Europe." (Boston Globe) Recognized around the world for her outstanding musicianship and enchanting interpretations of traditional Eastern European folk music, Muzzikás has been featured in a number of film scores, including *The English Patient*, which won an Oscar for music.

**Evening at the Apollo On Tour**  
In 4/4 p.m.  
Michigan Theater • Ann Arbor  
Sat 4/5 p.m.  
Detroit Opera House • Detroit  
Before there was Star Search, before there was American Idol, there was Amateur Night at the Apollo. Cheer on Michigan's rising stars as local acts compete for prize money and an appearance on Amateur Night at the Apollo in New York City.

**Bach Collegium Japan**  
Wed 4/9 7:30 p.m.  
St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church • Ann Arbor  
Led by Masaaki Suzuki, a much-celebrated organist and harpsichordist, Bach Collegium Japan has been widely recognized as a bright and ascending star among the world's leading interpreters of the masterpieces of Bach and his contemporaries.

**Matthias Goerne**  
baritone  
Thu 4/10 7 p.m.  
St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church • Ann Arbor  
The chosen pupil of legendary Danish teachers Dencker and Mathisen, Matthias Goerne stands out among his peers with his lush, vibrant baritone and profound artistry. The Chicago Tribune raved, "He is a great and true modern singer, perhaps the finest of his generation."

**Afro-Brazilian Dance Party**  
Featuring Daniela Mercury  
Sat 4/12 10 p.m.  
IMC Center • Canton, Mich.  
Get ready to samba the night away to this explosive performance by Brazilian bombshell Daniela Mercury and her troupe of dancers, singers and musicians at what is sure to be one of the most popular UMS events this season!

**EDUCATION EVENTS**  
Matthias Goerne  
Fri 4/11 7 p.m.  
Michigan Theater • Ann Arbor  
Daniela Mercury  
Artist Interview & Reception  
Fri 4/11 4 p.m.  
Interview and Meet with Room 1476

## Take a few pointers from experts when purchasing art

BY LINDA ANN CHONIN  
STAFF WRITER

Buying your first artwork can be daunting. Many people don't feel confident enough to make a decision. That's why it's important to heed a few tips from experts.

Decide how much to spend before leaving home but don't be afraid to change your mind if you find something you can't live without.

"I tell people to buy what they like," said Cindy Wolanuk, co-owner of Hermillage Gallery in Rochester. "Do not match a room to the painting. Look for a work that creates a sense of passion rather than something to go with a sofa."

Ray Fleming suggests buying from a reputable gallery in case you do change your mind down the road. At Robert Kidd Gallery in Birmingham they allow clients to trade up even years later. That's a good way to become a collector. Maybe you can't afford that \$32,000 Harry Bertoia sculpture right now. Start small

and work your way up.

Still not sure about what you're buying? Let the experts help. After 25 years in the business, Fleming knows his art. Before investing in the gallery, he earned a master's degree in painting from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, and taught at Wayne State University and Cranbrook's Kingswood School for 15 years.

Maybe you're already working with an interior designer. Fleming can give you an idea of what's available to them. "Designers make it easy for the client," Fleming said. "One of the backbones of our business is working with architects and designers. When people build a one-half to \$1 million house they're nervous about the art."

If you do want to buy the art without any help from an established gallery or designer, take time to learn about media, styles and values. Many galleries have Web sites. Take a virtual tour of what they offer. Fleming credits the advent of

the computer with helping build relationships with clients.

"The computer makes visual communication with clients and artists immediate," Fleming said. "Artists can e-mail me and enclose several of their paintings. I know what they're working on. It's so fast. It's so different from how we worked in the past."

Attending lectures is another good way to inform yourself especially in relatively new areas such as contemporary glass. Habitat Galleries' annual international exhibit documents the variety of ways artists are creating works with this molten material.

Gallery owner Ferdinand Hampton has scheduled a variety of informative sessions at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center to coincide with this year's show in April. A 7 p.m. lecture by artist Therman Statton on Thursday, April 10, "People don't consider glass for an investment," Hampton said. "They buy it because they really enjoy it. Collectors of contemporary glass like to say they think of it as a disease."

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