Fiberworks, Then, Now—Pow

By MARY DENISON

To enhance one's knowledge of fiberworks historically and increase one's sensitivity to today's works in fibers, the current double show "Historic Fiberworks/Cranbrook and Fiberworks Now/Cranbrook" at Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum should not be missed.

The total exhibition shows the fabric design department as a collection of individually vital artists.

The strong thread through the exhibit is this individual statement by each artist broken down into categories defining art as sculpture, functional woven objects, painting, design and printmaking.

It was surprising that photography was not also a category.

THEREFORE IT is impossible to discuss this strong show as a whole without touching briefly on each artist because none should be ignored.

Gerhardt Knodel, head of fiber design, said, "Of all the materials that are part of our lives, nothing is as close to us as cloth."

This idea stays with one while experiencing the historic exhibit and imagines the lifestyles of the peoples from the third to the 20th centuries.

"The artist today is part of a continuum. He is the growing edge of "tradition,'" Knodel said.

IT IS EASY to see parallels with the past in the sensitive current work of the students. In the Fiberworks Now exhibit there appears to be a deep sense of personal involvement and individual strengths on the part of the exhibitors.

Although a master artist himself, Knodel has managed to allow or stimulate each of his exhibiting students to explore what is their own contribution or vision rather than what might be an interpretation of his approach as the "master."

"The only fiber objects identifiable according to their use," the catalogue states are the used personal clothing hanging on coat hooks in the foyer of the museum. This coat rack illustrates the personalized remembrances and combined efforts of the students of the fiber department or the wish of each artist to show something of themselves through personal clothing.

Cornelia Bretenbach's hook has a CARTER SIZE 1 baby pajama top, obviously used, as a raisen is still stuck to it where it obviously was left with infant sticky fingers. Yawanit Thongpahusatcha has a straw hat with flowers. James Gilbert's blue work shirt has a roll of silk thread added. Deborah Kaufman hangs a silky animal suit without head.

MOVING FROM Gerald Bellas' spiral three-dimensional wood and rope piece, it is natural to identify his two-dimensional concern with the wood and fiber in an earthlike natural manner.

"Untitled Landscape" uses black and natural color to show the basic weaving interlacing of the warp and weft. The weaving technique is made more apparent because fiber ends are left to fall naturally. The jute, sisal and wood give a feeling of direct involvement with wood and the earth.

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In the "American Tradition" the title of the piece is printed on the jute sisal to give this piece a dielike stamp reflecting American industrialization. Star images and supports of wood and copper add to this illusion.

Valerie Dearing shows muted earthlike colors woven into garments which act as flexible capes with attached hoods. The objects, rather than defining fashion for a particular occasion, weather or person, leave themselves available to take on the shape of the individual who wears them and his needs of the moment.

MARY JANE Mazuchowski defies the catagories of sculpture and fabric design with her three dimensional chicken wires filled with newsprint. Leslie Heimstadt also chooses uncommon materials including zippers, yarn and string to make fabric design in a tactile wall hanging.

Leonard Maskowitz' "River Bed" combines weaving with applied paint which results in a stimulating marriage. The red and greens flow together not unlike woven yarn, yet the paint does what yarn can not and makes the whole greater than its parts.

JOAN LIVINGSTON'S felt pieces have a presence similar to Stonehenge. The three dimensional felts fill the gallery from the floor to ceiling and at first appear to support themselves until one sees the steel meatlike hooks, wood and rope and realizes the weight of these whalelike felts.

The pieces seem like a natural extension of the felt, yet a mystery remains as the hooks remind us of needed man-made supports. When one reads Ms. Livingston's statements in the "Historic Fiberworks" catalogue we see her vision of the historic Peruvian fragment to contain many of the elements of her work. She says about the Peruvian images, "Sacred Space—borderless — timeless — no where — everywhere — continuously undergoing the process of evolution."

DESIGN IS expressed by Yawanit Thongpahustcha in a textured sense, by Shigeko Watanabe with strong color, by Gail Singer through quilting, by Joyce Hullinger in abstract images and Cornelia Breitenbach by color variations and geometric shapes.

This concern with pattern and design on fabric is more traditional, but still innovative. Each design uses color and shape to create a mood or sense of space on a two dimensional surface.

These fabrics appear to be a primary success hanging as a painting. Warren Seelig's cotton knotted fabric combines black and white in square shapes which prove "less is more."

Richard Whitaker's "Gymnasium Revised" used cotton duck on masonite with sculptured shape lines defining design, quiltlike knots and natural wrinkles to make one really see cotton duck.

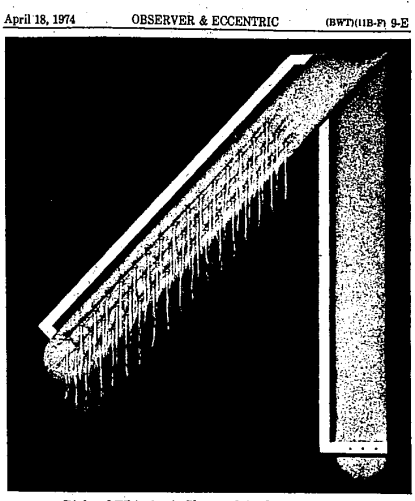
Deborah Kaufman's textured tapestry shows the art of textiles can combine design and craftmanship dependent upon each other. Edward Lambert questions the traditional use of fibers as woven into a basket and combines the translucence and hardness of plastic with the softness of woven silk. This creates attention as well as the idea vestiges of previous crafted containers.

JAMES GILBERT creates open sculptured woven pieces which become a part of the shapes and colors in the environment. Nancy Sweet weaves fibers in a dependable way but with personal variations which give a random sense of nature.

Gail Rutter and Hai Sun Ouh use fibers in a consistent systematic way. Gail's subtle variations of color reflect the landscape of the west and one feels the spirit akin to Georga O'Keefe.

The simple rhythm of the silk threads back and forth with color as the variation give one a peaceful sense of joy. Hai Sun Ouh used systems of rope and some silk to weave in and out of tubes in a calculating way. The sensuous fibers against clear plastic or wood and the repetition "one over, two over" give one a sense of ordered elegance.

Although not listed in the catalog, department head Gerhardt Knodel makes a strong noticeable contribution through his handscreened silk fabric gently supported by silk cording. This piece moves in an accordian like fashion to provide a canopy of colored fabric in a personal environment not unlike theater.



Richard Whitaker's fiberwork in the current show

Workshop sets chamber study

Workshop in the Woods has announced its fourth annual summer session to be held at Duns Scotus College, Southfield. Six weeks of classes (three days per week) devoted exclusively to the study of chamber music for advanced students begins June 23 and continues through August 2.

Headed by its founder and artistic director, Raymond Benner, the workshop will include among the teaching staff members of the Detroit Symphony. Co-founder Shaul Ben-Meir, also of the symphony, leads the woodwind department and is associate director of the workshop.

"The atmosphere of the Duns Scotus Seminary and its wooded campus is ideal for music making" Benner said. "With our music and the cloistered setting we become like a family each summer."

Two student-faculty concerts will be held July 12 and Aug. 2. Admission is free and both concerts are co-sponsored by the Southfield Arts Council and the City of Southfield.

New to the workshop and of special interest will be a three-week course for children ages seven to 12 called "An introduction to Music," employing the methods of composers Carl Orff and Zoltan Kodaly.

MRS. ANN THOMPSON of Detroit Community Music Schools will give three one-hour classes per week. The basic concept is the principle of teaching music to children through the use of their body, voice and senses before they take up an instrument.

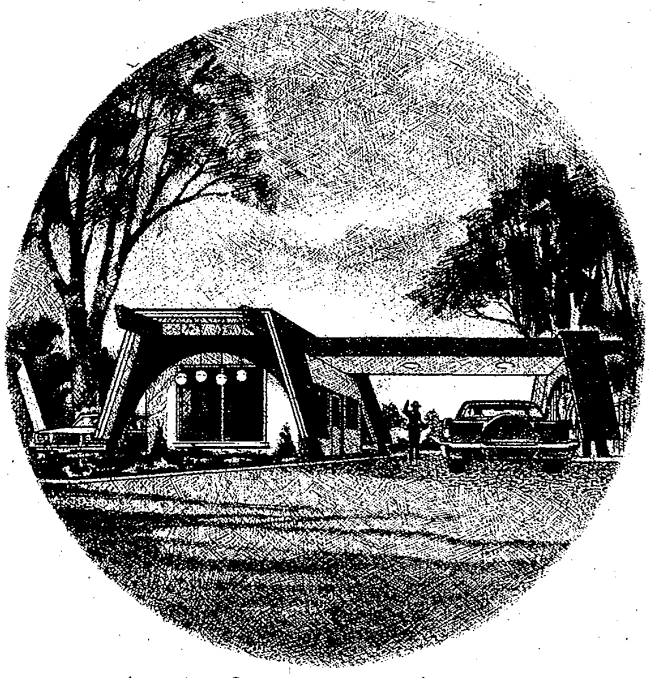
"This is the traditional European approach to music study," Benner said. "It puts the horse in front of the cart. An Introduction to Music is a course which provides the musical foundation upon which the student may build as he begins the study of an instrument."

Benner, who is assistant principal bass with the Detroit Symphony, has also founded the Bach for a Buck concerts at Duns Scotus, the Fairlane Music Guild and the Cranbrook Festival.

He has just recently accepted an invitation to tour Japan in May.

Woodlands

on Gilbert Lake in Bloomfield Hills.



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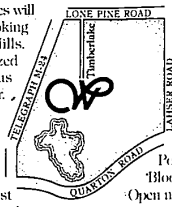

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