

Art exhibition marks American debut for Poland's answer to Michelangelo

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

Stefan Derbich, Poland's answer to Michelangelo, makes his American debut Friday at The Galeria at St. Mary's College in Orchard Lake.

Derbich's daughter, Emilia Palmer of Farmington Hills, began months ago organizing her private collection for the art exposition which runs through April 30.

On display will be more than 70 pieces of the 74-year-old artist's work.

His lifetime of art ranges from brightly-colored abstract oils to 300-foot murals that adorn ceilings and walls of cathedrals throughout Poland.

A brush and pallet alone, however,

cannot accommodate Derbich's talent.

He designs church interiors from the chandeliers to the pews, adding sculptured altars, handcrafted stained glass windows and religious mosaics.

The Zlotniki Kujawskie Poland native hand cuts each tile used in the life-sized mosaics which commonly depict the Last Supper and the Stations of the Cross. Lining the walls of churches, the tiles give the effect of sparkling diamonds, Palmer said.

PALMER AND her husband David were encouraged by their friend and acquaintances to exhibit the collection, shipped from Poland by Emilia's family in crates weighing 500 pounds.

"Everyone remarks that his style is so different from what they see in this

country, and we have so many paintings that we decided, why not let people see them?"

"We realize their great value and that sooner or later they will be recognized here," said Palmer, who first left her Poznan, Poland home and a job as a university professor in 1977 to work as a metallurgical engineer for Massey Ferguson, Inc. in Livonia.

Although the exposition is Derbich's first outside Europe, his work has appeared in international exhibitions and in Warsaw museums since his graduation in 1931 from the Academy of Fine Arts in Poland.

Art has been his life work with the exception of the five years during World War II and the German occupa-

tion of Poland, when Derbich was imprisoned in a German work camp.

"He started out with his own factory of furniture and toys. He made beautiful tables and desks with inlaid wood. Later, he began spending all spring and summer painting in churches and cathedrals, coming home on the weekends," Palmer said.

"He'd paint the ceilings standing up on scaffolding that was five stories high.

"In the winter, he'd paint at home, so much so that paintings were everywhere, and he'd end up trapped in the center of the room. But that's the way he relaxed."

Some of those paintings Derbich parted with for up to \$1,000, Palmer added.

ALTHOUGH BOTH Palmer and her only sibling, Tomasz, 30, opted to become engineers, they have tried their hands at their father's craft.

"When Tomasz was four and I was five, my parents took us to the town hall to see some work dad had just finished. When we got back, my brother's idea was to grab some charcoal and draw a train from one end of the wall to the other. He asked me to paint the smoke.

"We lived in an old apartment building in Poznan and the walls were about 12 feet high. The painters had just left after wallpapering the whole front room," Palmer said.

"Mom was busy in the kitchen with dinner, but soon realized we were too quiet. When she came in and saw what



Polish artist Stefan Derbich often chooses faces and hands as subjects for his oil paintings because they express so much.

we did the almost collapsed."

The Derbich children escaped punishment because "it would only discourage their love to paint."

"My dad said he liked the train, 'it looked good.' So it stayed on the wall

for a couple of years," she added.

Derbich's encouragement didn't accomplish much, however.

"I paint occasionally, usually on vacations, but my brother quit after the train," Palmer said.



At ease perched upon scaffolding towering five stories, Derbich takes a break while painting a mural on the ceiling of a Polish church early in his career.



Derbich's mosaics are found in churches throughout Poland. Made of hand-cut tiles, they usually depict the Stations of the Cross and the Last Supper.

INSIDE ANGLES

BATTER UP will be resounding throughout the area soon as softball leagues take to the fields. To help you get in form, the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department is hosting its annual spring training tournament for men the weekend of April 30. An entry fee of \$50 and team roster is due upon registration at the recreation office, 31555 11 Mile. Registration deadline is April 28. The tournament will be limited to 16 teams on a first-come, first-served basis. Games will be played at the Knights of Columbus and Drake Park fields. For further information, call 474-6115.

A FREE HOME care course is now available for anyone interested in helping persons with multiple sclerosis. The course is being conducted at Botsford General Hospital from 7:30 p.m. until 9:30 p.m. on either Mondays and Wednesdays for eight consecutive weeks. A different professional will speak at each session of the series, which the Metro-Detroit Branch Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society conducts twice yearly. For additional information, call the department of health promotion and development at 471-6091.

THE FAVORITE PET contest sponsored by the Farmington Jaycees turned out to be a real hit. Not only did Farmington come up with three favorite pets, the Jaycees raised \$240 to donate to the Oakland Humane Society. The top winner in the competition was Captain Toot, owned by Sue Campau of Peppermill Street. Second place went to Sunny Mangrum, owned by Mary Ann Mangrum of Harlan Street. Third-place winner was Bam Bam Winston, owned by Dale and Sandy Winston.

MATH AFICIONADOS, listen up. The 13th annual Lawrence Institute of Technology math competition for high school students will be April 25, 1-3 p.m. There is no registration fee for the competition, which is open to all high-school students. Prizes will be awarded to the top three finishers, with top prize taking \$100, second \$50, and third \$25. No calculators or slide rules will be allowed, and the college will provide pencils and blue books. The competition will be in the science building auditorium on the LIT campus, 21000 10 Mile. Deadline for registration is April 20. Interested students should see their high-school mathematics department head or call the LIT school of arts and sciences at 356-0200.

CONGRATULATIONS TO Josephine Helzerman of Lockway Drive, Farmington Hills, who recently was honored for her outstanding sales record. She is employed by Alvin's Women's Appar-

el at Twelve Oaks Mall. She was named the No. 1 salesperson of 1981 by her employer. Twelve Oaks management presented her with a special recognition award also. When asked how she became so successful, she said, "I treat all customers the way I want to be treated when I go into a store. I am honest in my statements to the customer and feel that I am a professional salesperson."

RACQUETBALL FANS will have an opportunity to contribute to a worthy cause April 25 when the Michigan Racquetball Association sponsors Special Olympics Racquetball Day. Participating clubs will donate a percentage of their court fees from noon to 6 p.m. to the Special Olympics. On that day clubs will be open to non-members, and no guest fees will be charged. In Farmington, Court Time on 24385 Halsted will be participating in the activities.

MARK BOWDITCH of North Farmington High School fame, along with Nancy Hodges of Harrison High School, have been awarded Eastern Michigan University Recognition of Excellence Awards. Winners of the university's \$1,000 scholarships must have earned a 3.5 grade point average in high school or community college and demonstrate outstanding leadership.

RECENTLY HIRED firefighters in Farmington Hills recently received certificates of recognition for their successful completion of a 66-hour basic-training course Monday at the Farmington Hills City Council meeting. Only 18 of the 100 applicants were accepted for employment. They made it through because of their dedication, civic mindedness and ability to meet performance standards, said Farmington Hills Fire Chief Larry Karon.

SUMMER'S COMING (believes it or not), and the Travel and Tourist Association of Southeast Michigan has begun to distribute its new summer calendar of events, a brochure filled with facts on festivals, fishing and other fantastic fun. To obtain a copy, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Travel and Tourist Association of Southeast Michigan, P.O. Box 1590, Troy 48069-1590. Containing events scheduled for April through September, the brochure is available at the association's office, 64 Park, Troy, in addition to state travel information centers, Greenfield Village, local and regional chambers of commerce and AAA offices. The brochure has more than 200 special summer events and a list of daily activities, such as museum tours and horse races.

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