



Contemporary masters:

The feeling comes through

Romberg's theme 'In the beginning'

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

Moving to the New York City area made a dramatic difference in painter Osvaldo Romberg's feelings about his art.

Romberg, now in his mid 40s, was born in Argentina. He lived in many parts of the world, but New York City influenced him the most.

He holds the chair of Distinguished Visiting Professor at University of Delaware.

His current one-man exhibition at Schweyer Gallo Galleries of Birmingham is one of more than half a dozen he will have around the world this year.

One of the most important of these is a retrospective in the Israel Pavilion of the Venice Biennial in June.

"Home for me is with artists," said Romberg, just before his opening here last week. He came to America thinking the future of painting was "not so favorable," and found he was wrong.

"One of the things New York gave me was confidence in painting again."

His visits to the galleries, to the museums and with artists confirmed that it is possible to "still do good abstract painting."

What thrilled him was the proliferation of art in New York City.

"Wherever you go there is art. When you go to by bread you see paintings. You are shaped as an artist by the things you like and the

things you don't like. I felt like a child full of toys.

"Now I'm doing things I was not able to do before."

HE COMPARED his "romantic abstracts" to a Rorschach test "as opposed to flat paintings of Noland, Olitski and Frankenthaler."

"Galaxies and Genesis," Romberg's show, gives a hint as to what he's about in these paintings. The works were painted over seven months and haven't been shown before. Still, there's a great deal more than those three words suggest.

Certainly, as stated in Sam Hunter's commentary in the attractive catalogue, these paintings are "visual metaphors for the 'big bang' theory of creation . . ." But they also become metaphors for creation in the broadest category — from the moment human life begins in the womb to meteoric movement of bodies in space.

Despite such awesome primal metaphors, Romberg speaks with a visual language that excites rather than overwhelms, that invites rather than discourages involvement.

Possibly it is because he provides anchors, forms in the midst of swirling energy, that sets at least partially rooted or at least not moving so swiftly.

On the mental level, these give stability. On the strictly aesthetic level, they keep the work from running away with itself. Now that Romberg is using this form of ex-



Osvaldo Romberg stands beside one of his two "sphere" paintings in his show at Schweyer Gallo Galleries. The left side of the painting, "Spheres on White," in brilliant colors, is a kind of homage to

Henri Matisse. Romberg pays tribute in his work to many great painters whom he reveres. Another whose influence is noted in his current exhibit is the 19th-century Italian master, Caravaggio.

pression, he does it with almost unparalleled vigor. Without the contrast, his works would be less effective.

THIS IS especially evident in the paintings such as "Green Genesis," 60 by 48 inches, "Night Galaxy," 72 by 84 inches, "During the End of the Night," 48 by 60 inches, "The Purple Genesis," 60 by 48 inches, and others in that same idiom.

There are paintings in the show that, while related to these, are more cousins than brothers and sisters.

"Spheres on White" and "Spheres on Gold," as Romberg explained "are a different kind of abstraction."

On one side in each, he, in essence, pays homage to Matisse by the use of small area of Matisse colors and shapes. These give way to a field of

irregularly shaped forms suggested by the sphere.

In "The Ochre Light," there is the suggestion of a madonna in the green abstract form.

In "Galaxy Athena," which will be shown in Venice, he places his gestural form against against a classically Greek background.

Romberg's work has been shown in major European museums and gal-

leries for many years. He has always paid tribute to painters who opened roads for artists.

That is still true in this show, but make no mistake, a fearless, courageous, masterful artist is in total command.

Continues through April 21, 330 Hamilton Row, Birmingham. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.

Drapell releases the unconscious

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

Since he completed his graduate work at Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1970, Joseph Drapell's star has been rising fast.

It is currently resting over Birmingham at the Robert L. Kidd Associates Gallery where his one-man show continues through Wednesday, April 4.

He's had a number of one-man shows in New York and Toronto in the last decade, and he has participated in a long list of prestigious group exhibitions, one of the earliest of which was at Peggy DeSalle's Little Gallery in 1969.

DRAPPELL, WHO had studied art only privately when he arrived at Cranbrook Academy of Art on Booth scholarship, was born in Czechoslovakia in 1940. He emigrated to Canada in 1966 where he still lives. He has a studio in downtown Toronto. His works are in the collections of many Canadian museums as well as the Guggenheim in New York and the Albright Knox Art Gallery of Buffalo.

In 1979 his work was selected for "Color Abstractions: Selections from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston" along with seven other painters: Morris Louis, Helen Frankenthaler, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Larry Poons,

Jack Bush and Friedel Dzubas.

This list helps place Drapell's work in the realm of contemporary art.

HIS WORK is abstract but not without meaning. Drapell is sensitive, well-trained and intelligent — qualities which show up in his work. He's concerned with the "soul" of his work, considering his unusual technique little more than a means to an end — the tool with which he reveals himself to his viewers.

He uses a spin technique which distributes thin streams of paint in ever-widening concentric circles on canvas that already has many layers of paint. Some of the underlayers are allowed to show through, sometimes temporarily interrupting continuing movement of the usually neat, but far from hard-edge lines.

IN SIMPLEST form, these works may bring to mind a large slice of a tree trunk with its fascinating ring design indicating yearly growth, or the circles formed when an object is dropped into the water, or imaginary sound waves, or — well, a hundred other phenomena which indicate something is being formed either in the cosmos or in microcosm.

Drapell adds gel to his acrylics and explained, "That's what gives me the textures and the glazes. The old mas-

'I'm after the spirit which represents the soul behind it. I'm always after that special soul.'

— Joseph Drapell

ters used it . . . I'm after the spirit which represents the soul behind it. I'm always after that special soul."

Speaking of soul, he mentioned painters Raphael and Velazquez adding, "I love Bonnard, his spirit is fantastic. (His work) has quality and visual power — most importantly the spirit or soul."

He said the artist concerned only with technique, the technician, will eventually become bankrupt.

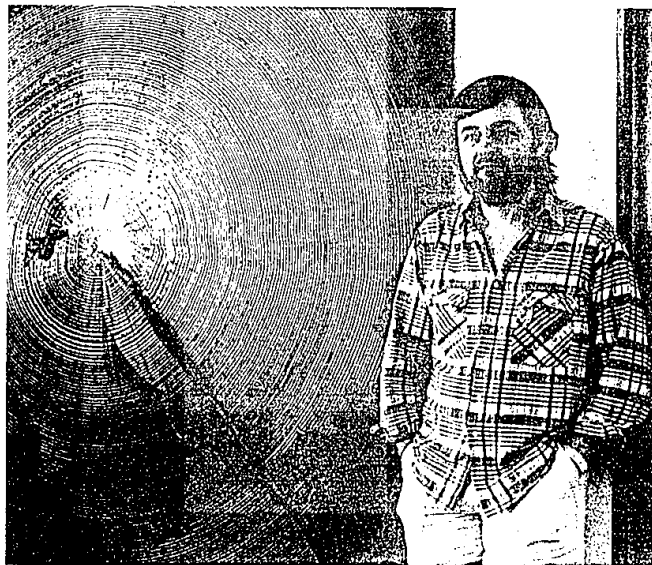
EXPLAINING that his work, inspired by natural phenomena, is something of a reaction to the machine-like art of the '60s, he added, "Very much I always wanted to have my own way of painting that wouldn't be derivative."

Describing his technique as far from mechanical and in a kind of defense for using a tool other than a brush, he quoted English painter, Joshua Reynolds, "Any tool is suitable to an artist, especially that which does not quite obey the will."

He does not, Drapell said, have any idea clearly in mind as he begins a painting as to what it will finally look like, nor would he want to.

"THE DIFFERENCE between art which is preconceived and executed, which I don't like, and art which is fed back by inspiration from the medium

Please turn to Page 2



Joseph Drapell, shown here in his studio in Toronto, takes an intellectual approach in conversation about his work, but endeavors as he works to tap into his unconscious.

Michigan Opera Theatre ready to fill vacuum

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

Michigan Opera Theatre's (MOT) General Director, Dr. David DiChiera, recently announced plans to extend the number of grand operas at Masonic Temple in addition to the company's regular fall season productions at the Music Hall.

The June 6 and 9 production of "Anna Bolena" with Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonynge at Masonic Temple is 50 percent sold out.

Next year MOT's grand scale opera at Masonic Temple will be "Aida" featuring Leona Mitchell, James McCracken as Radames and Bianca Derini as Amneris (April 17-20).

Early in her career Mitchell appeared with the MOT in "Faust" and "Porgy and Bess." Since then she has drawn national and international attention.

She sang with Pavarotti in his film, was written up last year in Time magazine and last December appeared in

the Met television broadcast of "Ermioni." She also will be singing the "Aida" role in Sidney, Australia, next year, although MOT has no plans to share this "Aida" production with another opera company such as they are with "Anna Bolena." Sutherland will sing five performances of the Donizetti opera with the Canadian Opera just before she comes to Detroit in June.

MCCRACKEN last sang in Detroit in "I Pagliacci" with the Met in 1978 and next year will sing Radames with the Met in New York.

MOT veteran, James Dietrich, Germont in this year's "La Traviata" and last year's Lord Enrico Ashton in "Lucia di Lammermoor," is singing Amneris. Both of his MOT engagements have been outstanding.

In a few months DiChiera will announce plans for MOT's two grand operas at Masonic Temple in 1985-86. DiChiera obviously plans to be ready to fill the vacuum if and when the Met stops touring. Boston has already pulled out of the Met spring tour

and DiChiera stated he feels Dallas will be next. He said he believes the national trend is for cities to develop their own opera companies.

One of the problems facing MOT is the orchestra. A larger one is needed for the grand opera repertoire, and the Music Hall's orchestra pit is too small.

There have been suggestions of an alliance with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. DiChiera said that these problems will have to be solved and said that in the next two or three years some interesting plans would be developed.

MOT's 1984-85 season will open Oct. 12 at the Music Hall with the Italian Spoleto Festival of Two Worlds production of "The Merry Widow" purchased by MOT through a gift by Mr. and Mrs. Charles M. Endicott. Mrs. Endicott is a MOT board member.

NEXT SEASON MOT will change its policy of double casting each production. Instead, one cast will sing all performances.

Metropolitan Opera star Jerome Hines and Carmen Ballo (title role in "Troezenia" in 1982) have been engaged for the "Magic Flute" for Nov. 2-10. That production will come to Detroit from the festival of the Opera Theatre of St. Louis.

This year's production of "A Little Night Music" was so popular that MOT has decided to produce another Sondheim musical "Sweeney Todd." This is also being produced next season by the New York City Opera and the Houston Grand Opera.

DiChiera said that while some may be offended by "Sweeney Todd's" strong subject matter, historically opera has always addressed such issues. He also plans to accentuate the operatic theatrical qualities of the work.

Casting for "Sweeney Todd" and "The Merry Widow" will be announced at a later date.

With the larger productions and increase in the season offerings will come, as expected, budget increases for 1985-86.