

A feminist approach to creating art

By Susan Thygeson-Aktry
special writer

Birmingham-Bloomfield Art Association recently hosted a workshop by the feminist-artist Miriam Shapiro.

She came to judge the Third Michigan Fine Arts Competition which opened last week at the association building, 1518 S. Cranbrook, Birmingham, and work with groups of artists.

Shapiro opened with a slide show featuring what she later described as a progression of systems ranging from "abstract expressionist" and through hard edge and finally my own system, "Geometry and Flowers (geometry being traditionalism and flowers being what I put into it)."

Then each of the two dozen women attending the workshop was asked to discuss her development, and the discussion took on a decidedly feminist theme.

"I certainly feel that as a group, women have been constrained," said Shapiro.

WHEN ONE participant mentioned having trouble finding subject matter and struggling with feelings, Shapiro said, "There's so much emphasis on 'feeling' Art is not art unless there's a system."

She also said that an artist selects a system and then picks mentors "in tune

review

with" that system.

"Now you see impressionistic art, black art, Jack Beal, representationalism -- and there are endless systems," she said.

Another participant said, "Hearing you talk about your work gives me courage to say what I've been wanting to say in my work."

Some women told about going back to college or night classes to pursue art studies while juggling responsibilities as wives and mothers.

One participant preferred painting eight hours a day, but Shapiro said, "I love the idea of being able to work a little, take on the phone a little, work a little, bake brownies a little. You'll never make it as an artist without choosing your own time and place."

Then she quoted Adrian Rich who claimed the problem with women is that, "We never get to name anything. For me, it's not working eight hours a day that makes you an artist, it's naming something that makes you an artist," said Shapiro.

Two themes that reappeared throughout the workshop were systems and life content.

Shapiro recalled having heard a "guy at Rutgers who finished his lecture saying '... and I don't want to see any girly stuff (apparently referring to the use of fabric or female-world content)."

In contrast, Shapiro said, "As a teacher, I would prefer to concentrate on what is the content of your life?"

"I personally hate the term 'self-expression.' There's more to making art than just emotion. You have to have a system. All you have to do is select the skills that are going to represent 'me, now.'"

REFERRING to the trappings of home and family life that mark the traditional female role, Shapiro said, "I say let's look at them. We're talking about the symbols of the nest; in the '70s, to put a handkerchief in a painting was called idiotic."

"For me, that's a political issue: whether the trappings of the home are considered idiotic."

One participant likened Shapiro's attitude to the opposite of bra-burning.

But Shapiro had an apt description: "I look over my shoulder and I see Pi-

casso and Matisse," adding that she looks to the work of her female predecessors and attempts "to emulate it."

Asked if attending art school makes one an artist, Shapiro said, "I don't know what makes you an artist. I don't think anyone would agree what an artist is."

When asked why no men attended the workshop, Shapiro answered that she didn't know. One participant suggested it was because her reputation as a feminist had preceded her, and added, "I wouldn't attend a workshop if I knew it was given by a chauvinist."

LINDA GOLDEN said the workshop brought together a wealth of varying viewpoints. "You get to see things through someone else's experience," she said.

Lee Bale called Shapiro, "a marvelous person... very genuine and generous with herself and her time."

Shapiro, who was born of Russian Jewish parents in 1925 in Toronto, Canada. Her father was an artist. She did most of her college work at the State University of Iowa in the '40s, before marrying Paul Brauch, a fellow art student there.

She gave her first solo exhibition at the University of Missouri in 1950. Her work has appeared group exhibitions, films, videotapes, slides, lectures, panels, workshops, articles, books and exhibition catalogs.



retirement memos

Margaret Miller

Open up the lines to get the line-up

Thursday evening is telephone time for the Michigan and Florida branches of our family, at least throughout the major league baseball season.

During the rest of the year we may call as the spirit moves or when some specific information is needed. But from April to September, the call is made late Thursday for line-up consultation by the partners in the private baseball.

Private baseball, I'll try to explain, is a game Joe started playing with a number of colleagues on the daily newspaper where he worked. He decided it was too much fun to give up just because retirement put 1,200 miles between him and the rest of the league. So he made daughter Barb his partner, continuing participation and doubling the fun.

OVER-SIMPLIFIED, the private baseball league involves over 25 franchises. They now are into their fourth season and each has selected, from among all professional baseball players and through a draft process aimed at being as fair as possible, a roster of 17 hitters and pitchers.

Each franchise owner "fields" each week a team of five hitters and three pitchers. And the owner during that week gains points according to the performance of the players fielded. They score one point for each hit, three for each home run, six for a pitcher's win and four for a save.

Prizes are awarded for the best score each week and for top finishers over the long season. And at the start of each new season all but seven players in each franchise go into a "new draft."

And as in real pro baseball, there are frequent trade discussions and occasional swaps to keep things interesting. BEING RETIRED has given Joe a bit more time to study performance records of the players, as well as printout predictions regarding their potential. He makes out detailed lists for Barb to take to draft meetings to determine new rosters.

And now with the season under way they give careful consideration each Thursday to the matter of which players will be up front the following week. It sometimes takes quite a bit of discussion for these two baseball buffs to agree. They also have to consider their not-so-silent partner, sister Kathy, who gives input from Los Angeles.

I follow the game and players, of course, but I leave the selection to the experts. Still, nobody likes those Thursday consultations any better than I. When all the business is decided, they keep the line open so I can talk to granddaughter Katie.

Margaret Miller was Suburban Life editor for Observer Newspapers for 16 years. She and her husband Joe have retired to Florida where she writes Retirement Memos.

club circuit

MICHIGAN ADAPTIVE PARENTS ASSOCIATION hosts a benefit performance of "Carousel" at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 19, in Players Guild of Detroit. Tickets are \$10 each and include an afterglow in the theater room. Reservation information is given by Jim Allor, 459-3371.

MOONDUSTERS meet at 9 p.m. every Saturday for a dance party in Livonia Activities Center, 15218 Farmington Road. The events are open to all singles over the age of 40 from all surrounding communities. Admission is \$5.00 at the door which includes dancing to a live band and refreshments.

DELTA OMICRON INTERNATIONAL FRATERNITY, Zeta Alpha Alumnae Chapter, meets at 3 p.m. Sunday, April 22 in the Home of Nancy Meyette.

Laura Morris, president of Delta Theta, Wayne State University, will give a lecture and demonstration on "The Dance."

Reservations are necessary by calling the hostess, 752-7599, or the presi-

dent, Mary Ann Pilette at 885-9405.

BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL WOMEN, Farmington Area Chapter, meet at 6 p.m. Tuesday, May 1 in Buggy Works, Orchard Lake Road, south of 13 Mile, for dinner, a business meeting, and a program called "Women and Law."

Guests are welcome to call Dianne Culler for dinner reservations or inquiries about membership. She can be reached during regular business hours at 983-8142, or at home evenings, 288-1112.

INDOOR LIGHT GARDENING SOCIETY OF AMERICA, Metro Detroit Chapter, meet at 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 2 in Farmington Hills Branch Library, 32737 12 Mile Road.

Guest speaker for the evening is Lois Thelke, home economist for Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service. She will talk about the cultivation and culinary uses of herbs. Guests are welcome. Nancy Stormont will take inquiries at 267-7109.

CHILD BIRTH WITHOUT PAIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION shows two films on the Lamaze-Pavlov (psycho-physiologic) method of painless childbirth at 8 p.m. Friday, May 4, in Sinai Hospital's Zuckerman auditorium, 6747 W. Outer Drive, Detroit. A \$1 donation will be asked at the door.

SPIN (Single Parents Instructional Network) hosts an all day workshop, from 9 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. Saturday, May 5, in Waterman Center, Schoolcraft College Campus, 18600 Haggerty.

Keynote speaker is Dr. Paul Pearsall from Sinai Hospital's Problems of Living Clinic. His talk is called "Living When Alone" and will be followed by films and discussions concerning sharing oneself and one's love with others.

The workshop is intended for, but not

limited to, single parents. The fee is \$8.50 and includes a light lunch.

SPIN is supported by a grant from Michigan Department of Education, Vocational Technical Education Service, Consumer Home Economics Unit, and administered by Women's Resource Center on Schoolcraft College. Reservations will be taken by the resource center, 591-4400, ext. 430. "Dealing With Adolescents," Job Club, Spin Networking, and "Getting Your Money's Worth in the Marketplace" are other programs and classes offered by SPIN in May.

All club news and announcements for this column are to be addressed to: Club Circuit, Farmington Observer, 2332 Farmington Road, Farmington 48024. The information must arrive before noon on the Monday before Thursday publication.

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Youth adopt lemurs

Alameda Early Childhood Center students who have spent the past year raising money to adopt two ring tailed lemurs will meet their adopted pets when they take a personally conducted tour of the Belle Isle Zoo May 16.

The four- and five-year-olds in Janis Wuerst's class started the fund-raising by making and selling lemonade. Their next fund-raiser was making "hearts" and "Care Bear" stickers. This week

they perform the last of three scheduled circuses for the final money maker which will give them the \$50 necessary for the adoption.

Meanwhile the youngsters learned everything they could about lemurs and their behavior by reading and seeing movies. They planned their own trip to Belle Isle through the zoo's deputy director.

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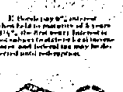


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