

Creative Living

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Novel loaded with intrigue

By Pearl Ahnen
special writer

"Sugartown," Loren D. Estleman, Houghton Mifflin \$13.95

"Sugartown," by Loren D. Estleman, of Whitmore Lake, is a fast-paced book that continues the adventures of Amos Walker, private eye.

Estleman has written other Amos Walker mysteries, all set in Detroit. "Sugartown" is the echo of Detroit and the reader will recognize the truth in the author's broad canvas of the city. The details of life in Detroit are in the book, though they are arranged so that they tell a story of intrigue.

As the novel opens, Amos Walker is hired by a very old woman who speaks with a Polish accent. She wants him to find her grandson, Michael, who has been missing for 19 years. The grandson disappeared shortly after his father, mother and sister were found dead in their

According to the police report the father killed his wife and daughter, while Michael was in school. After the two murders, the father killed himself. But that's not the whole story.

THE INTRIGUE begins when a Russian author, exiled and famous, hires Walker. The novelist believes that someone is trying to suppress his next book by killing him.

In the meantime, the Russian is in Detroit, hiding out in the Westin Hotel. Walker, the private eye, finds his own life in jeopardy when he suddenly realizes that there is a strange relationship between the two cases.

The novel is fleshed out with Estleman's frank critiques of the strategies and tactics employed by private investigators. If Walker doesn't know all the hangouts, bars, loan sharks, informers and ex-cops in Detroit and Hamtramck, he knows the ones that count.

There is a fine mixture of street people and straight people in the novel. This is Estleman's fifth in the Amos Walker series and it's as painstakingly researched as the others. The author divides his time between writing mysteries and westerns. Both genres are marked by close attention to detail.

Estleman deftly turns Detroit street life into an asset. What is omitted is heard all the more loudly for its absence and the emotional impact of the novel is the greater.

Above all, the book is about the frustrations and contradictions in what outwardly appears to be a healthy and well-knit family that eventually proves to be sinister and deadly.

Although the case of the three killings was officially resolved and closed by the Detroit Police 19 years ago, still lingering is the dark question raised



Loren Estleman

about the family when Walker is hired to find the missing grandson.

THERE ARE plenty of confrontations and interviews by Walker over drinks — supposedly the drink is sometimes milk — as he seeks out clues from ex-cops, weird characters and the obligatory pretty woman, a nurse who is companion to the old woman.

Why the title "Sugartown?" Early in the mystery the author explains that Detroit was known as Sugartown long before Motown was the vogue. The name was pinned on the city by the laborers who came to Detroit seeking the promise of work and high wages.

As Walker gets caught in the grip of intrigue and burrows deeper into the motives and loyalties of his clients, it is clear that author Estleman wandered the streets, bars and shadows in order to bring alive both Detroit and Hamtramck.

The book ends with an extraordinary solution told in such a matter-of-fact manner that the reader is all the more shocked by it. It's a tense, gripping story, one that keeps the reader guessing until the last paragraph.

Estleman has written 16 novels. The young and prolific author published his first book, "Oklahoma Punk," in 1976 when he was 24 years old. He is a graduate of Eastern Michigan University and a veteran police-beat journalist.

Several of his mysteries have been honored as Best Mysteries of the Year by the New York Times Book Review. His western, "Acres & Eight," won the 1981 Golden Spur Award of the Western Writers of America. He has been nominated for two Shamus awards, offered by the Private Eye Writers of America.

Loren Estleman will be autographing copies of "Sugartown," 5-7 p.m. Thursday at Birmingham Bookstore, 263 Pierce, Birmingham. This is the newest mystery featuring the hard-boiled detective, Amos Walker. Among the others are "Angel Eyes," "The Midnight Man" and "The Glass Highway."



"The Noble House," at left by former Detroit artist Brian Curtis is on Division Street in Ann Arbor. The painting, oil on masonite, is rich in contrast and very striking. The unusual work above, "Gray Bed-jacket with Hand Shadows," by Ron Isaacs is three dimensional acrylic on birch plywood, but from a distance, it appears to be a two-dimensional painting.

Staff photos by Jerry
Zolynsky

A fresh glimpse of reality

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

The New Realism show at Robert Kidd Associates Gallery of Birmingham presents enough different viewpoints for everyone to find a favorite.

New Realism, Ray Fleming of the gallery explained, is something other than photo realism which he labeled "old fashioned."

From looking at the many works in the show (some 65 artists are represented), there's less slavishness to exacting imagery and more concern with expressing an idea with solid aesthetics and a strong point of view.

While not all of the works in the show are as innovative as some might wish or expect, it is relatively safe, pleasing, and at some points, exciting.

It's a show to tour, savor and return to for a second, more intensive "go round."

The gallery staff did some four months of looking and researching to come up with the offerings.

SOME of the artists such as Deborah Butterfield, Ralph Goings, Charles Bell and John Cars-

man are well known nationally. Others are Detroiters, a few still working in the area. Many are from other states.

One of the outstanding works in the show is the polyester, resin and oil painted torso of a young woman in a string bikini, "Sunburn" by Carol Jean Feuerman. This piece, done with an obvious respect for the Greek tradition, shows great skill and sensitivity.

Several other outstanding pieces are John Carsman's large street scene painting which looks a lot like Nantucket; Ralph Goings' still life, a close up of a salt and pepper shakers; Alberto Magaña's paintings of underwear; Ron Isaacs' painting, "Grey Satin Bed Jacket with Hand Shadows;" and, Brian Curtis' oil on masonite, "The Noble House." The house in the latter is in Ann Arbor.

Hilo Chen's two watercolors of tulips and lilies are amazing, considering the medium. It is pleasant to see local sculptor Gail Rosenbloom Kaplin represented. Her sculpture, a camera and carrying case, is so close to the real thing that it takes some looking to be certain.

Robert Gnielawek's inclusion in the show is welcome. He's another Michigan street scene painter

whose oil, "Dave's Restaurant," shows growth in the handling of both paint and light. This also applies to George Kozman of Cleveland, who had a small exhibit at Kidd gallery about a year ago. He successfully moved from drawings of architectural detailing in crayon and pencil to the large acrylic on masonite which is in this show.

MANY of these artists specialize in only one area of subject matter. In doing this they slot right into the professional style of the 1980s, where specialization is often survival.

Some, like Michael Mahoney, pupil of Robert Wilbert, are still in the exploring-for-subject matter stage. Others, like Mary Ann Currier (acorn squash oil pastel on museum board) simply show extensive art skills.

Popular art lecturer Hope Palmer will give a program, "New American Realism," at 8 p.m. Monday, Jan. 15 in the gallery. Public invited. No charge.

The exhibit continues through Saturday, Jan. 26. Hours are 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, until 9 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 107 Townsend, Birmingham.

Wins international honor

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

A delightful thing happened to Bertha Cohen in Morristown, N.J., where the Bloomfield Hills artist had an exhibition of her paintings earlier this year. It included much of her one-artist show at Schreyer Galdo Galleries of Birmingham last May.

One of the visitors in New Jersey represented Carton de Venezuela, a prestigious group which sponsors a yearly traveling exhibition of works by artists of Latin American descent.

Cohen, born in Brazil, qualified in that respect. The only other requisite, as stated in the catalog, is quality, and she met that requirement, too. So much so, that, after seeing 20 of her slides, she was commissioned to do a piece for the show from which limited edition prints were made. The exhibition will open at the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Caracas and travel from there to major cities throughout the world.

Cohen's large acrylic, "El Rey" (the king), which she did especially for the traveling exhibition, is typical of her imagery that is both playful and serious, this one with background of regal purple.

"This puts me into the realm of more international art," she said, adding that she is thrilled to be part of a line of exhibitions that in the past has included internationally known artists such as Tamayo and Cuevas.

"The king," she said, "has been in my imagery for a long time."

She is doing several more in the same series and now feels secure in her style and approach to her art. "El Rey" is the first time she has ever had limited edition prints of her work done. The 150 prints were done by an atelier in New York City who was doing an edition of Picassos when she walked in to supervise hers.

Cohen said, "I hope this can open doors for me — I'm in such a relaxed mood inside now. It feels good. My work has the same passion that always went into it . . . and I continue to work from within."

Cohen has always drawn on her Brazilian heritage and a family background that includes music and all the performing and the visual arts.

In the most recent Carton de Venezuela invitational the artists were from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Venezuela.

Just days after this news, Cohen learned that she was selected to be one of four artists in "Expo No. 4" to be held at the Northport Galleries of Newport, N.Y., in March. The juror was Phyllis Brass, New York Times art critic. The competition was nationwide.

Cohen who studies at Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, is represented locally by Schreyer Galdo Galleries of Birmingham.



Bertha Cohen revived her interest in painting at Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association after moving here with her family. She was born and raised in Brazil.



"El Rey" the king, has a generous amount of royal purple in the painting. This is the first of Bertha Cohen's paintings to be used for a limited edition print. It is part of a continuing series she is doing on monarchs.