

Creative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300



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Marking 10 years of photo exhibitions

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

When Marcia Boxman, Elaine Yaker and Nanette Carnick opened Pierce Street Gallery of Birmingham 10 years ago, a lot of people gave them a year at the outside. A few thought maybe they'd last two or three, but few if any thought they'd beat the odds and be flourishing after a decade.

As they talked about their early years, they recalled the uphill battle to convince the public that photography was a collectible item. Boxman remembered hearing a friend comment after one of their early shows, "People will buy anything won't they?"

"I'm very proud of where we began," Yaker said of their first show in October 1980 of works by Mario Giacomelli. "He is a very fine printer. There was great beauty in his work, but this was not a simple show."

Boxman said Lisette Model's visit was memorable.

"Our greatest regret was that we didn't tape record Lisette Model when she was here," Boxman said. "We took her to see Cranbrook and she said it was an authentic American beauty."

Model, a tiny woman who loved to portray anything large, died several years ago in her mid '70s. Boxman said she laughs every time she thinks of Model and the biting comments she made about many of her peers.

Lazio Willinger, who photographed the great movie stars of the 30s and 40s, is another whom Boxman remembers.

"I just loved this man," she said. "He did a memorable photograph of Joan Crawford and after the book, 'Mommy Dearest,' came out, I asked him about her and he said, 'she was a professional' and he didn't want to be involved in that."

The women began to list the names of photographers who showed their works for the first time in this area in their gallery — Robert Adams, John Plask, Deborah Tuber-

ville, Disfarmer, Denny Moers, John Gruen — names were coming as fast as they could get them out.

All expressed regret that they didn't buy more for their personal collections.

"You find too in the art market that photography is the last collectible although prices have gone up," Boxman noted.

Yaker nodded in agreement.

"They've doubled and tripled in many cases," she said. "We hear the 'I wish I had, I should have, if only I had known' comments all the time. Ruth Bernhard came in at \$600, she's \$1,500 today."

"Lotte Jacobi was \$450, now she's \$1,500 and you can't get them," Carnick added.

Boxman said that photographs by O. Winston Link have gone from \$700 in 1983 to \$1,500 today.

All three expressed admiration for many of their artists. Yaker remembered how Denny Moers wrote and said he wanted them to change the labels in his show to Dennis because Denny wasn't dignified enough. Soon after he wrote again that he had changed his mind — go with Denny Moers.

THEY AGREED that the photographs by Moers represent the greatest range of work.

"Each stage has represented a further departure from the original," said Yaker.

"They're like outgrowths of each stage," Carnick added.

The gallery took shape originally because Boxman, Carnick and Yaker shared an interest in photography. They had been in photography classes together at Wayne State University and the Center for Creative Studies. They had attended photography workshops together — the most recent of which was in Colorado where they ended up doing a lot of darkroom work, something they had not done for a long time.

"The darkroom is still exciting," Carnick said.

"It's still magical, even after 10 years of not doing it, it came back awfully fast," Yaker said.

Out of this, a second business, Pierce Street Portraits, Fine Art Photographs of Children, was born.

"The work is done here," Yaker said. "A lot of time is given to just chatting and making the children comfortable. We're not focusing on a proper sitting, we're focusing on these children."

She said parents call and ask what the children should wear, should they buy a new outfit. The answer is to bring the child in some favorite piece of clothing, something that is typical of the way the child looks now.

Portraits are done in black and white, which Boxman called "the most honest of all art mediums."

"There is a new acceptance of black and white because we have been so inundated with color," Yaker said.

Before the gallery opened these three women were photographers first and gallery owners second. Then the priorities were reversed. Now, finally the two are in balance — or almost.

Exhibit documents decade

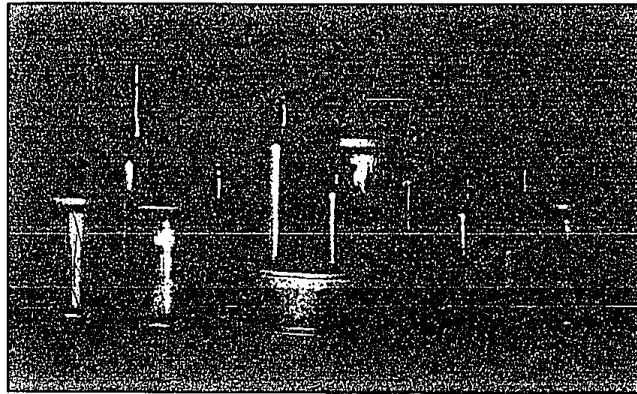
"Looking Back, 10 Years of Photography at the Pierce Street Gallery" continues through Saturday, Nov. 25.

Many of the photographers the gallery has shown over the last decade are represented — Bill Raubauer, Lazio Willinger, Disfarmer, O. Winston Link, Jay Desard, David Lubbers, Tomaszewski and hundreds more.

Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, 217 Pierce, Birmingham.



Portraits of children, such as this one, are done in black and white, which Marcia Boxman calls "the most honest of all art mediums." Black and white is gaining a new acceptance because people are inundated with color photography, Elaine Yaker said.



In 1981, Pierce Street Gallery exhibited the works of John Gruen. Included in that show was this photo, "Spoons and Bottles," taken in 1975.

Antiques show the simple grace of the East

By Louise Okrutsky
staff writer

After 24 years of collecting antiques, Edith and Barry Briskin began to search for a different challenge.

It came in the shape of a shop filled with mostly 19th century Oriental antiques. When the couple bought the antique store nearly four years ago, they were relatively unfamiliar with Oriental furnishings.

"We've always loved antiques and we've always collected a lot," said Edith Briskin. "But what do you collect next?"

Briskin Antiques in Birmingham seems to have answered that question for the couple. Most of the furnishings are of the kind used in wealthy Chinese homes. In some cases, the furniture's spare lines insulate it from the ebb and flow of changing styles.

"It hasn't changed in style dramatically since the establishment of the Ming Dynasty," she said. "Period Chinese furniture is Ming furniture."

Briskin's husband will be on hand with several pieces from the show Nov. 17-19 at the Junior Group 1989 Goodwill Antiques Show at the Michigan State Fairgrounds.

Furniture didn't hold the same importance as traditional artwork so there wasn't a demand for styles to change, Briskin said.

"It's very difficult to date the furniture," she said. "Sometimes you can do it by the wood."

Furniture makers used all hardwoods with a preference for rosewood.

THOSE INTERESTED in buying Ming Dynasty furniture can still find it, if they're prepared to pay the price. Chairs or tables can fetch between \$20,000-\$50,000 according to Briskin.

For the most part she carries 19th century pieces with a few 18th century. Most of the pieces are Chinese, which are more affordable. The most expensive items in the shop are a set of 19th century lacquered chests for \$8,000.

In the 19th century, when China opened up to trade with the West, porcelain and furniture slated for export didn't emulate the domestic styles. Instead these pieces were designed to resemble styles popular in a specific market. Late 19th century Chinese export items were made to reflect Victorian taste. They have the ornate touches that many associate with Chinese style.

The simpler styles of furniture made for the domestic market were built to be durable. Much of it was made to withstand the rigors of travel. Chests can be taken apart and stacked up again. Poles were slid through handles on each side of the chests to make the containers easier to carry.

"Furniture had to be easy to carry, easy to transport and very functional," she said. "It would have to be simple."

"We haven't been able to find nice quality furniture at affordable prices from Japan and Korea," Briskin said.

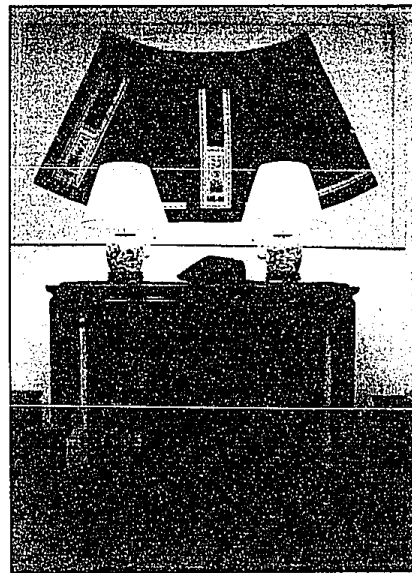
The exchange rate, unfavorable to the U.S. dollar, has helped to raise prices for Japanese and Korean antiques bought overseas.

Prosperity has changed the way Koreans and Japanese view their antiques. After centuries of watching invading nations cart off the best of their past, the Koreans are buying back their country's antiques. The Japanese have done this for years, according to Briskin.

Most Chinese pieces in the U.S. market have been out of that country for many years. The only antiques trickling out of China are generally of inferior quality. Dealers who do buy from the mainland must buy a large container of goods without really knowing their quality.

Meanwhile, a book published within the last few years in China has spurred an interest in making antique reproductions. The book detailing the dimensions of classic Ming furniture is a veritable primer on producing the pieces. Perhaps a reproduction market will open up, Briskin said.

THAT MIGHT enlarge the market

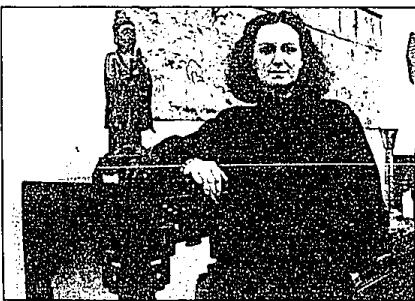


GUY WARREN/staff photographer

Furniture such as this 19th century table will be among the items Briskin Antiques will have on hand during the Junior Group 1989 Goodwill Antiques Show set for Nov. 16-19.

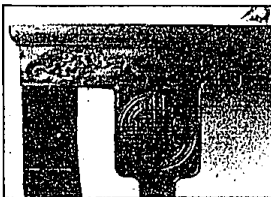
for the real thing. The antiques market represents a small portion of the household goods buying public and Briskin appeals to a small subset within that group. To widen her

share of the audience, she said that many of the pieces in her shop have such simple lines they blend well with other popular styles, such as early American or country.



GUY WARREN/staff photographer

Edith Briskin poses near one of the 19th century Oriental tables in Briskin Antiques, the Birmingham shop she owns with her husband, Barry.



Detailed yet uncluttered carvings such as these show the craftsmanship of 19th century Oriental furniture intended for the domestic market. Furniture was made of hardwoods, usually rosewood.