

Creative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300



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Sculptor lifts neon skyward

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

In the course of his history neon has been utilized for everything from spelling out "Exit" on the side of back road restaurants in the '30s to the freiform arches in the People Mover Greentown Station designed by Stephen Antonakos.

"Keith Somnier, Neon," an installation of four sculptures at Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum through this month, aids in re-establishing it as a fine art medium. Somnier uses it with all of the panache of a celebrated painter. While he leaves the actual technical hands-on part of the work to experts, he is the designer who has a thorough knowledge of the scientific aspects of his medium and how to get the colors and effects he wants.

He was greatly influenced by his extensive travel and study in India and the Far East. He said the piece in the show from his "Sel" series, the earliest in the exhibit, is "made from drawings in China. It is derivative of calligraphy, it's sort of a symbol of man."

Another piece is the show he said is reminiscent of pictographs, "just before the drawings begin to be less abstract."

SINCE 1965 when he was awarded a graduate fellowship at Rutgers, he has been known for working with industrial materials such as felt, vulcanized plastics and extruded aluminum. He has also done sculptures of bamboo, cheesecloth, foam rubber and combinations thereof. But, he said he wanted to do free standing work, he wanted to release it from the base completely. The neon works in this exhibition, particularly the pictograph one, float without any apparent anchor or peripheral confinement, so he succeeds in lifting his work from the ground.

That, some may remember, was the excitement of early neon signs, they seemed to hang in the atmosphere on snowy or foggy nights like

Leon Golub is one of a few artists presently working who uses his skills to build awareness of the need for social change. Some of his works in the Cranbrook show depict violence. The one pictured at right, "Threnody," speaks of terror.

colorful messages from outer space.

Sommier makes sure there's no pretense of that kind in his work. He almost flaunts his debt to technology, showing the wires, plugs and transformers and actually incorporating the wires into the design as lines in a drawing.

To achieve the effects he wanted with neon, he knew he had to work with architects and he is presently doing large public works of art in Long Beach, Ca. and New Orleans, La. A third, major work for the airport in Munich, Germany awaits final approval. This latter, he said, will be a functional piece of art, for it will help orient people to the color coding of the four zones of the airport.

He likes to combine neon with other materials, "I'm fascinated by mirrors," he said adding that he has used mirrors in the past and plans to do so again. He sees aluminum and copper continuing to have strong potential for using in combination with neon.

The exhibition in the hall opposite is "Leon Golub: The Aesthetics of Power," six very large social commentary paintings on unstretched canvas. Golub built up his paint, then scraped and removed the layers, to create a sparsely colored surface as free of gloss and shine as the skin of a potato.

His dramas of simple, basic people whose lives are upset by unknown or unseen assailants, are set in South America.

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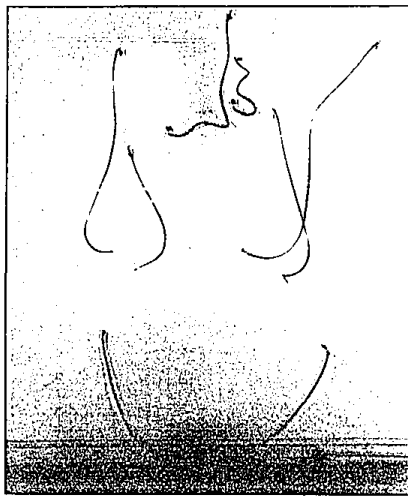
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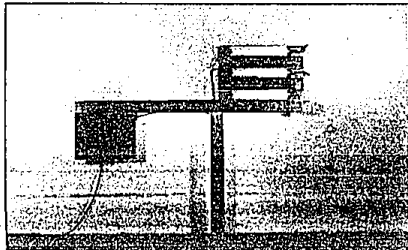
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"Pictograph I," of neon, above, by Keith Somnier, 72 by 98 inches, appears to soar much higher in its effect upon the senses. "Wall Slash II," 97 by 157 by 12 inches, combines aluminum and neon. It is a later work, more indicative of direction of the artist's current work.



On her toes or in the air, she's ready

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

Wendy Shapero of West Bloomfield may soften her naturally mischievous look when she dances the role of Clara in the "Nutcracker" ballet at 7:30 p.m. Friday at Oakland Community College, Royal Oak. Certainly, in pensive moments, the 18-year old dancer with the beautiful complexion, haunting blue eyes and cascade of strawberry blond hair, looks the part and is looking forward to it.

The production is by the Contemporary Civic Ballet Company, Rose Marie Floyd, director and choreographer. Shapero, a 1989 Groves High School graduate, Oakland Community College student and dance teacher at Floyd's school, has been performing on stage since she was 3 years old and has studied with Floyd for 15 years.

Her most unusual appearance was as the double for the witch in Michigan Opera Theatre's "Hansel and Gretel" last month when she flew 40 feet above the stage, wiggling and squirming in full witch regalia — to the delight of the audience. She also was one of the two flying angels in the opera but felt more encumbered with the bulk of the wings and halo than in her outrageous witch costume.

Jeffrey Bruce who played the witch, wanted no part of flying. Shapero, on the other hand, said, "I didn't have a problem with it from the start. I could do whatever I wanted."

THE MENTION of another flying role, "Peter Pan," brings a big smile to her face — indeed, she'd like to do that one sometime. One she has done and especially liked was Puck in "Midsummer Night's Dream" with the Contemporary Civic Ballet. The video of that won first prize in heavy competition. A guest artist from the Jeffrey Ballet who



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Wendy Shapero, who will dance the role of Clara in the "Nutcracker" ballet on Friday also studies voice and theater in preparation for an exciting future.

was in that production advised her to go to New York and start auditioning for everything she could.

The vivacious dancer is every bit the classic ballerina, except for her eyes. There is too much animation and sparkle in those rich, blue eyes, too many flickers of a comical smile to ever typecast her as pure ballerina. And she senses that, too.

She attended a two-week dance seminar last summer at Hofstra University on Long Island studying with many top names in dance today. She's been studying voice with soprano Edith Diggory and acting at Actor's Alliance Theater.

These preparations plus the fact that her sister, Alyson, 22, recently was transferred to the New York City college marketing department for CBS Records make New York look very inviting.

Meantime, she likes teaching tap and jazz to students from children through adults. Her parents have supported and encouraged her career. Myrna Shapero said she knows one of these days both her daughters may be living in New York City. She is a bit wistful as she talks about it, but that's mixed with a great deal of honest pride in their achievements.

The auditorium at Oakland Community College, Royal Oak, is on the campus on Main, between 10 and 11 Mile roads. For ticket information, call 546-7484 or 641-9063.

More than 30 dancers from the Detroit area, including Wendy Shapero as Clara (left), will be in the Civic Ballet Company's production of the "The Nutcracker Ballet" Friday at Oakland Community College, Royal Oak.



Local authors turn out some classy stuff

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

If there are still question marks on your gift list, then some new books by local authors that may never make the best seller list, could ease your worries.

During the year, handsome books arrive at the newspaper office and some never get as much attention as they deserve.

What better time than now to present a few unheard literary works when the whole world is aggliter with millions of things to choose from and that very array dims the senses and puts the selective juices on automatic pilot?

If the word architecture creates pleasant brain waves then two locally generated, elegantly presented books may make it to your list. "Color in Architectural Illustration" by Richard Rochon and Harold Linton, VanNostrand Reinhold, is an engaging and detailed study of the effect color in illustrations of buildings has on the final product. View it as an artist and color theorist, is a professor at Lawrence Technological University of Southfield and Rochon is a lecturer in architecture at the same school.

"THE ARCHITECTURE OF GUNNAR BIRKERTS," The American



This is the second book on contemporary glass artists that Ferdinand Hampson has edited and compiled.

Institute of Architects Press, covers the work of this Birmingham-based architect in a very comprehensive fashion. You want to see what he's done — not just in Livonia, Southfield and Ann Arbor, but nationwide? Here it is, complete with drawings and excellent color photographs — a handsome tribute to an outstanding creative mind.

Louis Redstone, Livonia-based architect, is best known, as an author,

for his books surveying the sculpture of the world. This new one, "Louis G. Redstone From Israel Pioneer to American Architect," Iowa State University Press, is the story of an impressive individual who never stops giving of himself. It begins in Grodno, Russia, where he was born in 1903 and relates his escape to Palestine in 1920 and life in the United States. His physical work in Palestine, to help build a country, in turn cemented his desire to become an architect. He accomplished that after he arrived in Michigan, for the first time in 1923, to study architecture at the University of Michigan. It's an inspiring story that ought to be widely circulated among young people who often take the good life for granted.

"Fred M. Warner Progressive Governor" by Jean M. Fox, published by the Farmington Hills Historical Commission, is an extremely well-documented biography of the man who was governor of Michigan from 1905 to 1911. The author never does anything halfway, her research is thorough, the story is well told and the many photographs add visual interest. It's a fine piece for those who are interested in regional history and politics.

GLASS AS A CONTEMPORARY

art medium has flourished and grown dramatically in the past decade. Habitat Galleries of Farmington Hills is a center for support for glass artists from all over the world. "Glass: State of the Art II," edited and compiled by Ferdinand Hampson, founder/owner of Habitat Galleries with partners Tom and Linda Boone. This book, Elliot Johnston Publishers of Huntington Woods, documents in outstanding color the work of some of the finest artists working in glass today.

Sean C. Monk is most familiar in the Birmingham Bloomfield area as the expert on watches and clocks. He's active in the community as well as in professional watchmaker organizations. But there's another side to this genial person. He's a poet, a traveler and a writer. His new book, "The Road Past Wicklow — Stories of the Irish People," Filibian Press, is an attractively packaged volume of personal reminiscences. Each chapter is an entity, which can be read as a short story. Monk has as good an ear for conversation and stories as he does for the tick of a clock. Early on, he began jotting down impressions as he traveled back and forth across Ireland, starting when he was 19 in 1935. Photographs of some of the people and places and an



occasional poem by the author make it especially enjoyable. Birmingham Bookstore carries it, others may also.

TED SEEMEYER, 85, a Berkley resident, has friends from one end of the metropolitan area to the other. He's been involved in some aspect of the print media for many years. He did several well-documented pieces for this Creative Living section a

The book contains a biography of Birkerts by Kay Kisker as well as outstanding examples of his work.

couple of years ago. He even did a radio show on yachting in the '60s.

What many of those longtime friends don't know about Ted is that he wrote a novel, "The Blond Eagle," in 1943. He forgot about it himself for a long time. Then last year, he found his manuscript and decided to publish it through Vantage Press. His 60-page love story, set on Belle Isle, is available at several area bookstores.