

# Creative Living

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CLASSIFIED REAL ESTATE



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## Book illustrations turn into big draw



By Corinne Abatt  
staff writer

The Elizabeth Stone Gallery, 580 N. Woodward, Birmingham, the latest member of the "gallery gulch group," has a unique slant. The focus here is original art by illustrators, particularly children's book illustrations.

Stone, who opened her gallery last September, had retired just a few months previously as librarian at Brookside School/Cranbrook. "It's a very, very wonderful extension of the years I had at Brookside," she said.

It was as a children's librarian that she became enchanted with the illustrations in the books, met the artists when they visited Brookside School and discovered that many wanted to sell their art, but had no outlet. The school had bought several fine paintings by children's book illustrators and Stone had been collecting such works herself — buying through the Bush Gallery in Boston.

This is her first foray into the business world and the many things she had to learn quickly leave her unimpressed.

"I've always been a person who likes challenge. I'm in awe of what I've done. I love it so much. I haven't a business or marketing background, but I'm learning and my husband is very supportive," she said with a smile adding that his work as a manufacturer's rep in the electrical field doesn't exactly dovetail with her skills, but he does have a great appreciation for art.

**HER ENERGY, KNOWLEDGE** of children's literature, enthusiasm for her new business and ideas for the future, will certainly carry her a long way. Her stable of outstanding artists is expanding daily. She has more than 30 and a surprising number are local or have local roots —



JERRY ZOLYVSKY/staff photographer

Elizabeth Stone has found a wide open field for her gallery specializing in illustrators. She doesn't know of another between Boston and California. She's just been invited to do a special exhibit for the national meeting of the Association for Young Writers in Grand Rapids in November.

Leonard Lubin, formerly of Dearborn, now of Baltimore, Md.; Gerald McDermott, another Dearbornite, now living in California; David McCall Johnston of Franklin; Chuck Gillies, Berkeley; Kat Thacker, Ferris; and Sharon Drinkwine, Troy-based illustrator, who also works at the gallery. Johnston's highly prized original illustrations are exclusive with her gallery.

Stone is already publishing lithographs. The first is from McDermott's award winning book, "Arrow to the Sun." The second is a delightful scene of animals in a forest, "Tessie and Friends" by Nonny

Hogrojan. A silk screen of an illustration by Rosemary Wells is in process and Stone plans to publish others by Hans Wilhelm and Susan Jeffers (either Cinderella or Halloweek) very soon.

McDermott will be back in this area to be the guest speaker for the April 3 luncheon sponsored by the Birmingham Bloomfield Children's Book and Author Society at Temple Beth El of Bloomfield Township.

STONE ISN'T QUITE sure what brings people into her gallery — nostalgia, curiosity or just plain interest. She just knows they come in a

steady stream, sometimes in classroom groups, sometimes one at a time. She stocks a variety of things related to the children's book field in addition to the original art, so that she has a broad price range — art books for children, autographed books for collectors, signed posters and poster/story guide kits for teachers. Coming soon will be birthday cards by children's book illustrators and videos. Whatever the reason they smile a lot while they're there.

Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 580 N. Woodward, Birmingham.

Leonard Lubin, native of Dearborn, now living in Baltimore, illustrated the book "Elegant Beasts." This watercolor and gouache painting (done for the book) of the cocker spaniel and Afghan house in elegant garb shows his great talent for costume design.

## Amsterdam to host Van Gogh retrospective

### Resident talks about relative

By Corinne Abatt  
staff writer

One of the most ardent supporters of the Van Gogh retrospective in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, March 29 to July 29 is Betty Blackford of Birmingham.

Not only does she have an abiding admiration for the great artist and his work and a substantial collection of books and material about him, she has a personal interest. She's family — a direct descendant of the Van Gogh family which, she said, is still going strong in The Netherlands. She noted that there are lots of Vincents on the Van Gogh family tree.

Her great, great grandfather, Johannes Van Gogh (1817-1888), an admiral, was director of the Navy Yard in Amsterdam. He was the uncle of Vincent, the painter. And the young man, 24, lived with his Uncle Johannes and family for 18 months while he was studying for the exams to enter college and major in theology.

Johannes Van Gogh also had a son, Vincent, who was a career military man and it is that Vincent who is Blackford's great grandfather.

Blackford is something of a spokesperson for Van Gogh, the person. Certainly Van Gogh, the artist doesn't need her help, not with his paintings selling in the high eight-figure range.

She said she became keenly interested in knowing more about her famous relative when, shortly after she finished college in the early 1950s, she went to the Van Gogh exhibition in Chicago. There she met Vincent Van Gogh, an engineer, nephew of the famous artist and son of Theo, the art dealer, who was so influential in his brother's life and career.

"THAT MADE a real impression on me — once I got going, I got interested in him (the artist) as a person — and I know him." She was seated in the library of her home in front of several shelves of books on Van Gogh. "Oh, he would be oblivious to live with. He would argue you to death, yet he would be a fascinating person. People are always saying 'poor Vincent.' He was poor by choice. One of the things in life that makes you happy is to do what you like and do it well."

She said that one of his uncles owned one of the largest art galleries in Europe. Blackford said she digs and scrounges for information about Van Gogh. She has studied his letters and his life, traveled to Holland many times, talked with people there, visited the places where he lived and taken slides of the important landmarks in his short life. "He believed in himself," she said. "He knew he was a painter — he certainly left a legacy. He was an absolutely beautiful writer. He was very



JERRY ZOLYVSKY/staff photographer

Betty Blackford, relative of Vincent Van Gogh, calls the area of her home library that has the books about him, "my fun place." Pictured at right is Johannes Van

Gogh, the uncle whom Van Gogh lived with for 18 months. He is Blackford's great, great grandfather.

expressive. He wrote in Dutch and French," she said, pulling a heavy book from her library shelf. "Everything known is in here — juvenalia, drawings and paintings." The book was "Vincent Van Gogh," by J.B. de la Faille, published by Reynal and Company, 1970. She has a collection of catalogs from his shows, her earliest, but not his, 1927 Basel, Switzerland.

"People think he never showed his paintings before he died — he was actually represented in four exhibitions. And there was an article about him in one major magazine by a well-known critic. So he was on his way . . . People think he went mad, but he didn't go mad, right up until the day he died, he was executing those paintings with precision," Blackford said.

AS SHE SPOKE about his early years she said, "He was a lonely child. He kept to himself. He loved nature, Vincent was very lonely as a child." She, like some of his biographers, thinks this was due in part to a strange set of circumstances. When he was born, his parents were still in mourning for a stillborn child, Vincent-William, born a year to the day before he was and registered with the very same number.



### Many other museums plan related shows

A major retrospective of the works of Vincent Van Gogh, marking the 100th anniversary of the artist's death, will be held March 29 (date of his birth, 1853) to July 29 (date of his death, 1890) in his native country, The Netherlands.

Because of the skyrocketing value of his paintings, it is a strong possibility that this may be the last time it will be possible to assemble such a representative body of his work. (His painting, *Irises*, was sold in 1987 for \$53.9 million.) Insurance costs, alone, may prohibit any future shows of this scope.

The retrospective, to be held in Amsterdam, is being compiled from the collections of the Rijksmuseum Vincent Van Gogh and the Rijksmuseum Kroller-Miller. About 120 paintings and 250 drawings will be in the exhibition, about one third of the paintings and about half of the drawings coming from the two Dutch national museums.

Other museums that will be loaning works include Musee d'Orsay, Paris; National Gallery and Tate Gallery, London; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Yale University, New Haven; Pushkin Museum, Moscow; and the Kunsthau, Zurich, Switzerland.

Among the paintings that will be seen together for the first time are *The Weaver*, *The Potato Eaters*, *The Sower*, *Sunflowers*, *The Night Cafe*, *The Yellow House*, *The Bedroom*, *The Arlesienne* and *The Berceuse*.

It is stated in the advance catalog of the exhibit, "The retrospective exhibition will focus on the works that he himself regarded as the core of his oeuvre. . . . In his oeuvre, we find a series of landscapes, urban views, portraits and groups of drawings after earlier paintings. For instance, for *The Yellow House in Arles*, he designed a decoration that included several *Sunflower* paintings."

There are many special events being planned in conjunction with the retrospective such as an International Van Gogh Symposium; an ex-

**Among the paintings that will be seen together for the first time are *The Weaver*, *The Potato Eaters*, *The Sower*, *Sunflowers*, *The Night Cafe*.**

hibition of his letters with drawings. In the late summer at the Rijksmuseum Van Gogh; a survey exhibition of Van Gogh's influence on modern art at the Rijksmuseum Van Gogh; and an exhibit, "Van Gogh at the Loom," at the Netherlands Textile Museum, Tilburg. There will be at least four other major related exhibits in other museums in The Netherlands such as: "Japanese Prints from the Collection of Vincent and Theo Van Gogh," Leiden; "Around Van Gogh," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and a Frans Hals exhibition, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem. In letters to his brother, Van Gogh expressed admiration for Japanese prints and for the paintings of Hals.

This also promises to be a banner year for publications relating to Van Gogh. A film festival and special TV programs are being planned.

A special easy-to-carry handbook is being prepared in several languages for the benefit of tourists. It will list all the exhibitions and events on Van Gogh for this year and tell which Dutch museums have works by Van Gogh in their collections. It will be illustrated with paintings, drawings and letters by Van Gogh and show where he lived and worked in The Netherlands.

Several outstanding artists have offered to design a poster for the retrospective free of charge and the Dutch ministry of cultural affairs has provided a grant for the development of ideas for souvenirs from designers.