

Beasties are a blend of fantasy, realism

By Corinne Abell
staff writer

If you tried to visualize the artist who did those great, big lovable creatures in front and inside the Danielle Peleg Gallery of West Bloomfield, you just might come up with someone like Dennis Pearson. With a warm, affable smile, he puts the heads of his amazing collection of large and small animal sculptures, which collectively he calls "Beasties," and talks about them with pride and affection.

"They like to be hugged," he says picking up a small one with a flat

back (to be used as a side or coffee table) and turns it over. "See, they're all signed and dated."

He walks over to a large one and hops onto its flat back and jumps up and down, "and they're almost indestructible."

Amusing animals, a blend of fantasy and reality, have always been the subject of his art, whether it's stained glass, drawings, jewelry, painted furniture or the wide-eyed, shiny-faced menagerie in the gallery.

Pearson said he first made them of papier mache, gave up on them

for a decade or so until he happened on fiberglass.

ACTUALLY, HIS twin brother was repairing a Corvette and suggested he look into the possibilities of the fiberglass he was using.

"It's taken years to develop this really nice shiny surface," he said. And the surface he was speaking about is resistant to all weather conditions, so the beasties are all-weather animals, indoors or out. He described the building, shaping, painting and finishing as "labor intensive" with many steps before the sculpture is finished.

The strength and lightness of the fiberglass over an armature or reinforcement gives Pearson great latitude in size.

He can build a beast or herd of beasties, strong and durable enough for a busy city playground or one small enough for the corner of a nursery.

He can put holes in the middle for children to crawl through or make a flat back that will hold a four or five people and their coffee cups.

He calls the ones 13 feet and over, a cross between a speckled dinosaur and a zebra that got caught in a point can.

HIS BEASTIES range from single color — blue, purple, red and yellow — or, stylish, black and white striped to those with neutral background highlighted with rather painterly multi-colored spots and squiggles.

Since they often go as fast as blue-light specials, he has three assistants working with him. Yet, he says each sculpture is individual, each gets the same attention as a painting or any other work of art.

Twenty-five of his beasties were featured as part of the 1987 Easter celebration on the south lawn of the White House, Washington.

Pearson grew up in Madison, Wis.,

attended University of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the Summer School of Painting in Saugatuck.

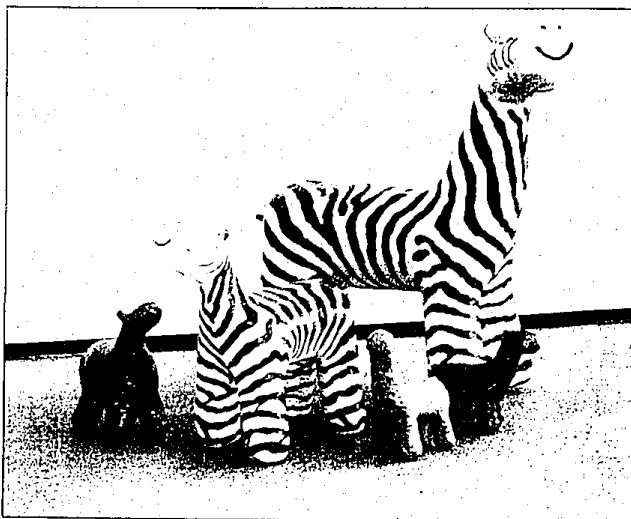
This exhibits fits well with the "Art of Animation" which is in the adjoining gallery. Individual "cells" from cartoons by Hanna Barbera,

Fritz Frelang (creator of Tweety, Jiminy Cricket), Chuck Jones (Road Runner and Coyote), the Disney Studios and others carry a glimpse of the magic of childhood entertainment.

Some are the original production

cells, others are hand painted and limited edition serigraphs.

Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, Cross Winds Mall, 4301 Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield.



Missisa Mitchell starred as Swanilda in "Coppelia" last Saturday night. Mitchell, a permanent member of the Cleveland San Jose Ballet, lived in West Bloomfield and graduated from Seaholm High School.

Rock opera this weekend

"The Third Day," a rock opera written as a sequel to "Jesus Christ Superstar," will be performed Saturday-Sunday, March 16-17, at Beverly Hills United Methodist Church, 2000 13 Mile at Evergreen.

Show time is 7:30-8:30 p.m. each day.

"The Third Day" takes the characters and the enthusiasm of the rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar" and carries them through the next 40 days.

Beverly Hills Pastor Scott Wilkinson says he wrote the sequel to answer the question, "Why did Jesus have to die?" and to present the

Resurrection in rock opera form for those who wished it had been in "Superstar." "Superstar" was written by Andrew-Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice.

"The Third Day" was first performed in 1972 by students from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. It has since been performed 20 times nationwide.

Four of the original performers will join a local cast of 35.

There is no admission charge but an offering will be taken to offset expenses. A reception will follow. Child care will be provided.

Wildflowers program on tap

The Friends of Matthaei Botanical Gardens and the Huron Valley Chapter of the Michigan Botanical Club will sponsor "Wildflowers in the Home Landscape" at 2 p.m. Sunday, March 17, in the auditorium of the gardens, 1809 N. Dixboro, Ann Arbor.

Dr. Richard Pippen, Western

Michigan University biology chair and botanist, will present a slide lecture.

He will spotlight the recent dramatic interest in using native species in garden plantings and will familiarize the public with the range of suitable plants and their landscaping use.

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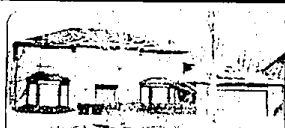
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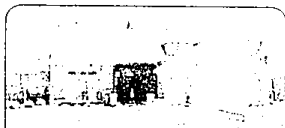
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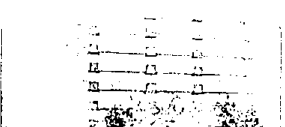
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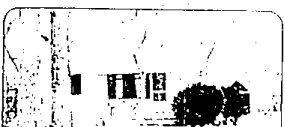
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