

Bandboxes hold history, memories

BY MARY KLEMIC
STAFF WRITER

These boxes can hold history, even when empty.

They are bandboxes, ancestors of the suitcase, used by pioneers. Today reproductions of bandboxes are sought by collectors.

Examples of the art of bandboxes — those made by nationally known artisan Berta Montgomery of Ohio — will be featured at the Pebble Lane Quality Art and Craft Show, Thursday-Saturday, Oct. 29-31, at Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 Woodward at Lone Pine in Bloomfield Hills.

Show hours are 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday-Friday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday. Admission is the voluntary contribution of one or more non-perish-

able food items for the church's annual holiday food baskets.

Local artists appearing at the show include Connie Powell, pen and ink sketches and paintings; Audrey Baenziger, painted baskets; Erika Waldok, European folk art; Ellen Mast, Santas; and Carol Czechowski, herb wreaths. Fifty other artists will also participate.

"Nestle is a part of it," Sandy Callahan of Bloomfield Hills, one of the organizers of the show, said in explaining the bandbox appeal.

"I love the papers. I love (Montgomery's) styles. They're all lined, all signed."

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back to 1880."

The bandbox industry, featuring wooden boxes lined with newspaper, originated in the late 1700s in New Hampshire. The craft became well known throughout New England.

Montgomery, whose father was a paper hanger, makes her boxes from cardboard, not wood, and covers them with wallpaper. The boxes come in many different sizes and shapes, including half circles.

Much of the wallpaper she uses dates from 1903 to 1940. Montgomery can also make paper look antique, by sanding it down or applying a mixture.

Montgomery, now 74, started making bandboxes 15 years ago. She got into the art by collecting and selling antiques with her

husband. Her fame spread when Pat Ross, author of "To Have and To Hold: Decorative American Boxes," bought some of the boxes and put them in Ross' New York shop.

Boxes by Montgomery have appeared in several magazine ads, and featured in Country Living, Architectural Digest, American Home and Better Homes and Gardens. Barbara Streisand has bought her boxes. The publisher of "To Have and To Hold" ordered 75 of Montgomery's boxes to be used as gifts.

Some of the older wallpaper used by Montgomery was found within 20 miles of her house, in old hardware stores.

"How much more is out there we don't know about?" Flannery said.

Russian art replicas offered

An exclusive collection of fine art replicas from Russia's State Hermitage Museum will be unveiled at the new Scott Shuppert store in Troy, 977 E. 14 Mile. Metro Detrolers will have a rare opportunity to view and buy the limited editions Oct. 30 to Nov. 2.

Until recently, the only people able to view and enjoy the treasures in the Hermitage firsthand were those who traveled to St. Petersburg and toured the museum. The Hermitage is renowned throughout the world for its spectacular collection, which began in the 18th century by Catherine the Great, and revered today by art lovers, scholars and art historians for its outstanding collection of French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces.

Through a major breakthrough

in autograph technology, masterpieces from the Hermitage Museum are available in fine art replicas. These replicas are so precise that there is virtually no difference to the unaided eye or touch. Every fine detail, brushstroke and texture have been faithfully recreated.

After 13 art experts from the Hermitage inspected and approved each stage of the process, chief curator Vladimir Matveyev signed the certificates of authenticity for each edition and allowed the Hermitage's official seal to be applied to the back of each canvas.

The collection of masterpieces features works by Camille Pissarro, Vincent Van Gogh, Claude Monet, Paul Cezanne, Andre Derain and Pierre Bonnard.

Carousel from page 1D

on a tour of the family home and grounds. At least one or more carousel animals live in each room of the Abbott home including the kitchen. A butting ram carved by Daniel Muller, similar to a figure in the auction, stands against a living room wall opposite a Muller deer, a near duplicate of one some lucky bidder will take home.

Expressive, sensitive eyes hallmark Muller's animals, the horses assuming poses of classic equestrian statuary.

"The ram's one of only five left. Muller is top of the line as a carver. His figures are proportioned and very well done."

On the upstairs landing, a cat jumps with joy over a fish he has caught. The sassy feline is a 1910 Dentzel, created by Salvatore Cerigliaro. Originally, there were 36. Eighteen remain.

"Some of the carousel animals are prettier than others. It's like a painting. The beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

The tour continues to the barn, where an outside row stander covered with more than 150 levels by Illions reflects a thorough knowledge of Greek and Roman sculpture. Illions' art works began with life size sketches after he studied the movements and mannerisms of horses at nearby racetracks. His lifelike poses and manes blowing wild in the wind are legendary in the world of carousel art collectors.

The Illions County Island style horse walks alongside a 1913 Dentzel topknot jumper horse, and a horse and a goat from the "Bobo merry-go-round."

"They get smaller and plainer as they go in. This one was from

the third row," Abbott said, pointing to the topknot.

The elaborately carved and decorated outside row animals from park machines command the highest prices, while smaller figures from portable country fair machines exact less.

As Abbott opens one last door, a garage full of carousel animals come to life. A proud rooster in a trot catches a glimpse of visitors out of the corner of his glass eye. A cute little German horse fools the outsider into thinking that his mane moved, whisked by the wind.

Golden age

The golden age of the carousel dates from 1890 to 1925, when a handful of European woodcarvers migrated to America in search of their dreams. Unable to find work in the furniture or architectural industry, they joined the lucrative amusement business, carving carousels.

The average carousel horse consists of about 40 buswood and poplar pieces crafted in one of three styles: Coney Island, Philadelphia, realistic; and Country or County Fair, smaller and portable.

The idea behind the 19th century American carousel wasn't new. In A.D. 500, Spanish crusaders played a similar game on their way across Europe. By the 1700s the French invented "carroussel," a competition where knights on wooden horses threw lances through golden rings.

At the turn of this century, 2,500 to 6,000 carousels whirled to the music of the band organ; approximately 130 remain after fire,

■ 'Some of the carousel animals are prettier than others. It's like a painting. The beauty is in the eye of the beholder.'

Jon Abbott
collector

floods and neglect took their toll.

Few carousels survive in Michigan.

Those that do are at the Henry Ford Museum at Greenfield Village in Dearborn; Historical Crossroads Village in Flint; the Grand Rapids Museum and Auto World in Lansing.

Valued art

"A respectable indicator of their art value is that museums are starting to take an interest in them."

The fact that prominent art auction houses have gotten into the picture in the last three years serves as yet another indicator of the artistic and historical value of carousel art. While enthusiasts argue about whether figures are fine art or folk art, Sotheby's and Christie's East in New York have placed carousel animals on the auction block.

"Many authorities in the field consider them works of art, and they are rare, so it's a golden opportunity for investors," said auction publicist Rose Szewd of Southfield.

Wide appeal

People from all walks of life fall for the sound and magic of the carousel. Abbott sold one horse to the late singer/actor Rick Nelson, and two horses to actor Charles Bronson.

Celebrities aren't the only ones

interested in carousel art.

"A female mail carrier (he knows) buys one like clockwork every 18 to 24 months and a female draftsman, one a year. One fellow historian — he built to showcase 40 carousel horses — there are plenty of stories I could tell about the eccentrics, too," Abbott said.

"I think a lot of women buy them for nostalgia. The men buy them as a sculpture and because they're a heck of an investment."

Carousel art collector Ron Mitchell, who recently moved from Rochester Hills to Ortonville, attended last year's auction. He has collected four horses — an Illions, a Muller, a Carmel and a Herschell-Spiller — over the last 20 years. He plans to bid on extremely rare menagerie animals (any animal but a horse) this time.

"It's definitely art. They're mostly wood, all hand-carved," said Mitchell, who owns the Janel Company, designers of future cars for the Ford Motor Co.

Many carousel art collectors decorate their homes with the animals.

"They're more fun than coins or stamps, because you can set them out and enjoy them," Abbott said. "You can talk to them. Some people even name them."

"They're fun and they're colorful, and they're Americana."

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