

German-born artist states his case for public art

By MARY KLEMIC
STAFF WRITER

"The funny thing is in Germany and Europe they always called me the American German. In Detroit they called me the German all the time."

So said artist Georg Ettl, who emigrated to Detroit from his native Germany when he was 18 years old. He studied literature, philosophy and art at Wayne State University and the Sorbonne in Paris, lectured at WSU and Macomb Community College, and was associated with Detroit's Cass Corridor artists before he returned to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1973.

Ettl, who was born in 1940, was at the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum in Bloomfield Hills recently to speak on "Being an Artist in Germany Today: A Personal View" at a symposium. The symposium was connected to an exhibit and other events about German art. (See related story.)

German art draws from a variety of sources, both the emotional, free and the architectural, rational-mainstreams. The Cranbrook

exhibit, "Graphics of the '80s from the Federal Republic of Germany," is a good representation of this, Ettl said in an interview.

"I think it's a very good reflection of the German kind of mind, the German thought," said the artist, whose studio is in a small town (population 40,000) near the Dutch border.

"I like to do something that (has the possibility someone else can build on it.)"

The progression of German art was interrupted by the war, as some artists fled. It is now where it should have been after the war.

"After the war, nobody wanted to build on anything... That whole continuation was interrupted."

Ettl originally wanted to be a philosopher.

"I realized (working with) words was too tedious for me."

He preferred the "direct visual image" of graphics.

"I spent most of my life drawing. I draw everything."

The Cranbrook exhibit includes Ettl's silkscreen print triptych of a head with various hats. The

triptych is a traditional form often used with sacred art. Ettl's heads in profile have a contemporary look. An architectural influence is seen in their shelf-like chins.

In Germany, the government subsidized the arts through a program that said 2 percent of any public building had to go to the arts.

"The program didn't work because art was considered an afterthought." This was the fault of the artists, who should have insisted on working with the architect from the beginning, Ettl said.

Ettl does a lot of art work in squares and other public spaces. You find nothing has changed when you constantly do gallery work year after year, he said. Public art work deals more with bureaucracy and compromise.

"I do work with museums and galleries but in a very limited way."

"When you work in a public space it's a completely different ball game."

"You have to be a little more humble (and have) nerves of steel

sometimes."

Ettl recently worked on a castle in France that is being transformed into a museum for contemporary art. He depicted the favorite horses of Henry II. The response from local residents delighted the artist.

"I never had so many people (comment on) the work. They really loved this work. (It was) something they could identify with."

Ettl disagrees with critics who say public art must be diluted. Viewers who have less education in art tend to be much more honest, he said.

The artist was glad to be back in the Detroit area.

"I had a little bit of homesickness for Detroit. I really enjoyed the art department at Wayne State University."

"It's still a lot looser here, a freer spirit in general."

"I think that the complete lack of discipline can lead to chaos, although at heart I'm a very chaotic person."

"I couldn't have thought of a better school to go to than Ameri-

can art schools."

The violence of neo-Nazi groups in Germany disturbs and angers Ettl. When you see such violence, the art becomes secondary, he said.

"I'm not so much worried about the arts as the politics. The arts will be OK."

"The government is not as forceful (against the violence) as they ought to be."



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Cranbrook from page 1D

depicts a vague structure at night, partly supported by what resembles the silhouette of a human head.

Some artists use bright, sometimes primary, colors and sweeping strokes. Karl Horst Hadicke presents powerful silkscreen prints of a jaguar and of a hand holding a dismembered arm. Rainer Fetting's untitled silkscreen suggests a figure holding a blazing fire in his hand.

Katharina Slevierding's color photograph "Gazing at the Sun Around Midnight" features faces partly coated in red. By comparison, the silkscreen works of Walter Dahn suggest childlike innocence. His "Big Brother" shows stick figures before a tower topped by a head that looks out over them. "Hornets," with a black background, shows elongated human and insect figures. One in-

sect may be inserting a wing into the human's ears.

Other events at the museum explore contemporary cultural practices in the German arts. (A symposium Nov. 21 featured six internationally prominent scholars.) A series, "German Films of the 1980s," continues 2 p.m. Sundays to Jan. 31. A four-part series, "Video Art 1976-1990, The German Contribution: A Selection," will be shown at 2 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 12 and Jan. 23 and 30.

Both series are shown in the deSalle Auditorium at the museum. Costs are covered with general museum admission. The events and exhibit are sponsored by the Goethe-Institut in Ann Arbor.

The museum is open for general viewing 1-5 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday. It will be closed Dec. 24 and 25 (Christmas Eve and Day).

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Donations are sought for the FAR Conservatory of Therapeutic and Performing Arts, in the First Presbyterian Church at 1609 W. Maple in Birmingham.

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Workshop offered

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