

# Painted diary

## Works tell of relationships

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN  
SPECIAL WRITER

A storyteller by nature, Margaret-Erminia Cassani cunningly couples acrylics and words in paintings that focus on human relationships.

Ten of her large canvases, filled with food for thought, are on exhibit through Jan. 29 in the lobby of Livonia City Hall, Farmington Road and Five Mile.

Sometimes brilliant and at other times brooding, Cassani's flat planes of color combine with geometric and organic shapes to kindle the imagination in a style she refers to as "painted diary."

"They're very personal, like pages out of my diary," Cassani said in an interview at her Livonia home. "They're mainly relationships with people. There's a figure in most of my work because I like people."

"Lady Writing a Letter" tells the tale of a woman's desperation. Cassani paints the lady in shades of distraught as she sits down to write a letter to a love interest gone away.

Through the use of symbolism, Cassani reveals the subject of the woman's thoughts by painting a small red heart on the empty chair sitting alongside her. Dark underpainting outlines and accentuates the pain in the unhappy woman's face. Cassani's palette is disconcerting with grays and deep violets bordering on black. Text painted on the canvas literally screams the question, "Why

Don't You Answer My Letters?"

"All of these have a real psychological process to them," Cassani said. "They're female-oriented, the things that women think about — universal themes."

"insalata paradiso" (Paradise Salad) focuses on a seductively dressed woman aggressively offering a tomato to a less-than-enthusiastic man. The woman's outstretched arm serves to "Flug Fong" the viewer between the two.

Cassani invites us to study the man and woman and speculate about their relationship. The symbolism of a man tossed into the salad adds a sense of playfulness and arouses the curiosity.

Color, space and line influenced by the Fauves, Folk Art, Impressionism and American Scene painters like Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, Ben Shahn and Edward Hopper, along with the 1930s modernism of Milton Avery, are reflected in Cassani's work. There's also historical reference to French Impressionists' Matisse, Toulouse Lautrec and Paul Gauguin as well as Russian surrealist Marc Chagall.

"Detroit Street Scene," a triptych by Cassani, was juried into the "Our Town" show in Birmingham last fall. From the barrenness of suburbia to a friendship with a girl of another

race, the artist probes societal values in works of subtle protest.

"They're memories of growing up in Detroit. They're all part of my experiences," Cassani said.

Cassani spent her first eight years growing up in the Six Mile-Woodward area of Detroit. Here, neighbors reached out to help each other, reached out to touch each other's lives. When her family moved to the wilderness of Livonia, Cassani found the loneliness of barren landscape matched the chill of human relationships.

Instinct guides Cassani in the choice of pure, intense colors. She likes "using bright Fauve-like combinations of color, and at other times dark, seemingly brooding Romantic combinations."

"I like dark colors but it depends on what mood I'm in. It depends on what I'm trying to say. The ones that have an emotional content seem to be dark," Cassani said. "I paint everything dark first, then add the light colors. It's almost like priming a car."

The majority of the highly stylized paintings that incorporate written messages began as rough drawings in a sketch pad. Cassani says she "can't just begin with a blank canvas with no direction, no idea as to where," she's going.

"When I started out painting

20 years ago, I had dreams of eventually living as an artist in New York," Cassani said.

"When I was studying for my BFA in painting and printmaking, my instructors would say my work was too literal. That turned me off after I got out of school. Now I'm going to do what I want. If nobody likes that, that's OK."

Cassani earned a bachelor of fine arts at Eastern Michigan University. She also holds a master of arts degree in mass media from Wayne State University, where she's working on a doctorate in mass media specializing in Italian cinema.

"They're almost primitive. There are areas of solid color and she uses words in the painting," said Livonia arts commissioner Ed Ferguson.

Cassani's future plans, besides continuing to create new pages in her painted diary, include resurrecting the 18th-century Italian Renaissance art form of "cassone," which were paintings on chests used as wedding gifts. The term is where her family name comes from. Future works also include functional painting or decorative painting of tabletops and chairs, just for fun.

"I hope to have some kind of rapport with the viewer, for them to see that same quality, have that same feeling," Cassani said.

Hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday.

# Detroit Focus board elects its president

Adole R. Farabi of Grosse Pointe Shores has been elected president of the Detroit Focus Board of Directors.

She succeeds co-presidents Lucille Nawara and Lela Sonnen-schlen, whose terms ended June 30 with the close of the spring exhibition season.

"I am excited about contributing to the continued success of this vital organization," Farabi said. "With 14 years history of exhibitions, publications and other activities, Detroit Focus has uniquely served the needs of our community."

"I look forward to working with the board of directors, the members of Detroit Focus and the entire art community to accomplish even greater things in the times to come."

As president, Farabi brings a wealth of knowledge to her position. She holds a master of fine arts degree from Eastern Michigan University and a bachelor of fine arts degree from Wayne State

University, and has taught at the university level.

Her experience includes a number of private business ventures, including the development of the former Leitner Brush Co. building in Detroit into an artist's studio and living space.

Farabi is familiar with the needs of artists and the business of the arts as a result of her tenure as director of the Michigan Chapter of Artists Equity. In addition, her years as a volunteer for the arts have provided a background in grants writing and fundraising. Farabi has also made art a part of her life through collecting.

A recently adopted strategic plan has resulted in Detroit Focus leaving its Bricktown exhibition space. During the transitional period, messages can be left by calling 852-1624. Correspondence may be directed to Detroit Focus, P.O. Box 32823, Detroit 48232-0823.

# Class takes psychic look

The city of Southfield's Cultural Arts Division will present a series, "Psychic Adventures," on three consecutive Wednesdays, beginning Jan. 20.

The meetings will take place at 7:30 p.m. at the Burgh Art Site, Civic Center Drive at Berg Road. Registration is at the Parks and Recreation Building at the Southfield Civic Center. The fee for all three classes is \$35. Those who aren't Southfield residents have an additional \$10 fee.

These programs are intended for demonstration and entertainment purposes only. For more information, call 354-9528.

The first meeting is called "An Evening with a Psychic." A professional reader will demonstrate her psychic ability. The next gatherings are "An Evening of Palmistry and Astrology" and "The Pendulum Swings."

For those wishing to sample this adventure with only one visit, a special one-time session, "Psychic Demonstrations for the Layman," is scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 10. Cost for this one class is \$15.

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# Festival applicants sought

The Rochester Arts Commission seeks applications from artists interested in exhibiting fine arts or fine crafts at the juried Art 'n Apples Festival, Sept. 11-12, 1993, in Rochester Municipal Park.

Slide deadline is March 16. Application fee is \$15 per category. For an application form, send self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Art 'n Apples Festival, 407 Pine, Rochester 48307, or call 651-7418 or 651-4110.

# 3-session winter art course features DIA tours

An introductory, three-session course in art, ranging from French and German impressionism, to modern and African art, will be

offered during the winter semester at the Center for Creative Studies, in combination with related tours at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

The course, open to high school students and adults, will take place 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Jan. 27, and Feb. 10 and 24. Lunch at the

DIA is scheduled. Tuition for each session is \$25. Registration is now open. Call 872-3118, Ext. 471.

# LOOKING FOR THAT PERFECT PLACE?



One that has everything you dream about? Enough room for the new arrival. Or a great school system that gives the kids an opportunity to grow and learn? Maybe you're a golfer and want a place that near the links but not too far from town. If you're a nature lover, you'll want something that's tucked away in the hills with a little stream and enough room for a garden.

Whatever you're looking for, we think you'll find it right in the newspaper you're reading. If you've caught up on all the hometown news, check the listings in our Creative Living Real Estate section. Of course we'll understand if you can't wait and want to check for that perfect place right now.

Go for it and good luck!



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