

THURSDAY, MAY 26, 1994

CREATIVE LIVING

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PERSPECTIVES



MARY KLEMIC

Think creatively, responsibly for arts

It's a matter of responsibility. Bettie Buas of Troy refers to "our civic infrastructure" (cultural institutions and programs) as "an essential part of the quality of life."

This civic infrastructure is as important as the physical infrastructure. Cultural institutions are good for the spirit and the imagination of individuals as well as economic and promotional assets for the community.

Citizens should accept responsibility for these institutions, and decide on how they should be funded. Resources are limited, and efforts are on to downsize state government. It may be time for regional cooperation on the matter, "something that we've not done successfully in the past," Buas said.

As a senior research associate of the Citizens Research Council of Michigan, Buas has been looking at supplemental regional funding for the arts, an alternative to the way major and smaller cultural institutions and programs are now funded. She will talk on this subject at the general membership meeting of the Cultural Council of Birmingham/Bloomfield, 7:15-9 p.m. Wednesday, June 1, at the Village Players Theatre, 752 Chestnut at Hunter in Birmingham. The public may attend.

Cultural programs and institutions in Michigan have ridden a funding roller coaster, Buas said. They have had a tradition of tax support from the city of Detroit and the state. But by the mid-1970s, city appropriations to cultural departments were substantially reduced.

Michigan responded by instituting state equity grants for the support of cultural institutions and other city services. The state responded to its own financial problems by reducing state equity grants in 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 and reorganizing the state arts agency.

An entertainment service tax is one possible source of revenue. A tax of 5 to 6 percent on currently untaxed entertainment services in Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties would produce about \$50 million, which is slightly more than the highest level of state funding for large and small cultural institutions in the region. Money could be apportioned using an allocation formula, or distribution committees could be established.

Art in the open

Different kinds of public art in Oakland County were presented in the May 19 talk in an installment of the Brown Bag Lecture Series at the Oakland County Computer Services Auditorium.

In her slide-illustrated lecture, Charlotte Stokes, formerly of Oakland University and now associate dean and professor of art history at the University of Michigan-Flint, showed how public art is incorporated into the county's life and isn't just for decoration.

The steel doors by Morris Brose at the Holocaust Memorial Center at the Jewish Community Center (at Maple and Drake in West Bloomfield) are an interpretation of the doors of the boxcars that carried people to their deaths in the Nazi concentration camps.

Monuments to the dead are another form of public art. Beautiful and historic cemeteries are found throughout the county. At Pontiac's Oak Hill Cemetery, trees and monuments are interspersed. At Troy's White Chapel Memorial Cemetery, the gravestones are flush with the ground, leaving the lawn open to view.

Comforting scenes of trees and statues provide visitors with places to sit and contemplate. Corporate art goes back to the renaissance period, when the Medici sponsored art. An area example is the bronze "Corporate Head" by Michael Ayrton at the Kmart International Headquarters on Big Beaver Road in Troy. The piece features two heads - one looking forward, one looking back with a smaller head inside it. A mirror alongside the head makes it seem whole.

"Covington" by Michael Hall at 30833 Northwestern Highway in Farmington Hills doesn't have the corporate symbolism of "Corporate Head." The aluminum work resembles a fence, and the artist was addressing barriers and boundaries.

Art in the campus is another form of public art found in Oakland County. At the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, the placement of works give the sense of a stimulating

See PERSPECTIVES, 6D

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Creative Living next week:

- Mary Klemic's Perspectives column.
- Exhibitions, art gallery event listings.



Giant values: David Clements had an eye for unusual signs when he went around the Detroit area with his camera. This sign, which also proclaimed "We Speak American," was in Windsor, Ontario.

Photographer looks for signs of history



It's a time of the signs at Lulu's Gallery in Royal Oak as David Clements, a film and video producer/director, exhibits his photos of landmark architecture and unusual signs. Clements had an eye for the ironic and the historic when he took the photographs.

By MARY KLEMIC
STAFF WRITER

The urban jukebox plays a variety of songs: humorous ditties, cheery teatoppers, mournful melodies, stately overtures. The tunes come to mind upon the sighting of advertising signs and painted facades of buildings.

Different kinds of community music are featured in a display continuing through June 11 at Lulu's Gallery, 405 N. Main in Royal Oak. The exhibit is a distinctive collection of photographs taken by David Clements, a Royal Oak film and video producer/director and location scout.

A few of the photos are of performing musicians, but most of them are of signs and buildings, some of which are familiar in this area. From landmarks to relatively unknown businesses, from signs emblazoned with neon to posters with uneven, handlettered lines, a range of visual melodies is presented.

Clements is interested in adaptation and usage of buildings, such as a bank turned into a party store or storefront church. Photographing them is a way of preserving our history. He finds the subjects ironic rather than sad.

"I have a real interest in urban archaeology and commercial archaeology," said Clements, an urban photographer for 25 years.

"I see the humor in things." Some signs are like badges on the sky, such as those of the St. Christopher Motel, the China Clipper restaurant (with airplane), Wonder Bread and Gus Brown Used Cars (with a woman in a polka dot dress and a pink car).

The Flamingo Trailer Park, with giant pink birds, is seen in summer and winter (a Santa and candles are in the latter scene). The Guild Theatre, which proclaims its peep shows, is painted a bold red. A more elegant note is struck by the

ornate carving on such places as Dom Polski Hall and the University of Detroit High School.

Messages can bring smiles or double takes: "Draws The Poison Out" (by a steam bath), "We Speak American," "Our Own Ground Round Since 1946," "We Tote The Note," "Do It Yourself" (by pest control businesses), "We Love Lucy's Ice Cream."

The T in "cocktails" of the Nocturne Cocktails sign has slipped out of line, as though it had tasted several samples. The tattered sign of the Riviera Theatre is a sad marker, more touching when the stately carving

on the building is seen as a reminder of past glory.

Sites have varying degrees of recognition, such as Tiger Stadium, Redford Granite Works, Uneeda Auto Parts. Sometimes the setting tells a story: the white house with "lawn art" of furniture, plants and rugs; silver silos that look like coils; a rusted car in the snow; a gas station with a bullet hole and a picture of Jesus visible in the window.

Institutions and places of worship are featured, including Antioch Baptist Church, Macedonian-Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Islamic Center of America, Sacred Heart Seminary, Korean Assembly of God and St. Aloysius.

Clements' photographic art is exhibited nationally, most recently at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

Call (810) 542-6464.



Steamy sign: Clements spotted this sign in Detroit. The photo is one of those featured in Clements' current one-man exhibit at Lulu's Gallery in Royal Oak.

Fine art fair set

By LINDA ANN CHOMIN
SPECIAL WRITER

Dreams become reality Saturday-Sunday, June 18-19, when Robert and Janet Nagy of DreamCatcher's art gallery host Southeastern Michigan's first fine arts only fair, Art Birmingham '94, in the Birmingham Theatre parking lot behind DreamCatcher's, 340 E. Maple.

The two-day art fair provides an alternative, Robert Nagy says, to the crafts-oriented fairs that have become so prolific. He feels that the fair could be the shot in the arm, that downtown Birmingham merchants need.

Art Birmingham '94 will spotlight more than 80 local and national fine artists working in a variety of media including painting, sculpture, glass, jewelry, clay and graphics. Bonita LaMarche, associate curator for 20th century arts at the Detroit Institute of Arts, juried the show, which will award \$10,100 in prize money.

"We want to attract a certain type of art for the show, high-quality fine art," Robert Nagy said during an interview at DreamCatcher's in Birmingham.

"I got the idea for the fair when I went around to all the shows and talked to the artists. They complained, the booths were too small. But more importantly, they didn't like that they were billed as fine arts and ended up having a lot of crafts. They said, we want a fine art show."

Juror selection

When LaMarche juried the show April 21, she sought only high-quality art that was innovative.

"I looked for pieces that were reflective of new ideas, very high quality art work, museum quality art work, things that have never been shown in arts and crafts shows," said LaMarche said.

"We were forced to exclude a number of people unfortunately, because they didn't meet the criteria, but since this is the first one, we wanted to set the standards right away."

Judging will take place on-site for Best of Show (\$5,000) and Best of Category: First Place (\$475), Second Place (\$275) and Third Place (\$100) awards based on the quality of art, presentation and overall look of the booth Saturday, June 18. Ribbons will be awarded that evening.

Response

Since the Nagys first put the word out about the show, he has received only positive feedback from artists and businesses.

"There's been a great response. I have people coming in every day. I'm a merchant here. I want to promote the community," Robert Nagy said.

This isn't the first affair the Nagys have produced. They're old hands at promoting special artists' events at their 4-year-old DreamCatcher's galleries, featuring American Indian art, in Birmingham and Hot Springs, Ark.

They spent the last two years planning, and planting the seeds for Art Birmingham '94. Scheduled to coincide with the World Cup Soccer Tournament, the Nagys said it was crucial to have positive cooperation from the city, business community and artists.

"We've received tremendous support in getting the event off the ground from Birmingham Mayor Bob DeLaurea, whose office is behind this 100 percent," Janet Nagy said. The Nagys' enthusiasm for ART, 4D

See ART FAIR, 4D

Artbeat features various happenings in the suburban arts world. Send news leads to: Creative Living, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009, or fax them by calling (810) 644-1314.

EXHIBIT KICKOFF

Beginning Wednesday, June 1, the Creative Arts Center of North Oakland County, 47 Williams in Pontiac, will present "Soccer at the Center," an evolving interactive series of exhibits on the theme of World Cup Soccer. All events are kicking off the center's soccer fundraiser, with proceeds earmarked for scholarships and educational programs. Call (810) 333-7849.

Art Beat

The first event will be at 11 a.m. Wednesday, June 1, at the center, with the Detroit Wheels and Rockers doing demonstrations for children and signing autographs.

The main gallery at the center will be converted into a soccer field in which youngsters can play soccer and add to a soccer mural. For a \$15 donation, you can have your portrait made as a spectator in the mural. Other donations are \$25 for a full-length portrait, \$50 for

a full-length, freestanding portrait as a soccer player and \$10 for children. Local artists will be available for making portraits noon to 4 p.m. Saturdays, June 4, 11, 18 and 25, and 6-9 p.m. Friday, June 17, when the center will have a reception and participate in a Pontiac gallery crawl.

Soccer exhibits will be featured in the center's upper and community galleries. Soccer T-shirts from the center's competition, along with refreshments and soccer-related objects, will be sold at a booth on the Phoenix Center Plaza in Pontiac during World Cup weeks. Displays and soccer activity will end Thursday, June 30.