

Arts & Leisure

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CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

**Swaab brothers:
Twins in stature,
but individual artists**

By the time Adam and Neil Swaab were in middle school, their infatuation with comic books was becoming an obsession. Looking back, it was their entryway into the world of art.

If their mother, Barbara, was concerned about their fetish with Marvel Comics, she didn't lead on. Even when they decided to further develop their artistic talents by attending art school last fall, Barbara didn't flinch.

"If you have a chance to do what you love, even though it might be financially tough, then you do what you have to do," she said.

"They knew what they wanted to do when they were 13. It would've been criminal if I would've tried to dissuade them."

Apparently, for the Swaabs of Orchard Lake, the push and pull of the yin and yang prevails. Left-brain logic is balanced with right-brain creativity.

And Adam and Neil have equal amounts of each. Studying art at Rhode Island School of Design and Syracuse University, respectively, isn't a risk at all. Not with their talent and determination.

The 1996 summa cum laude graduates of West Bloomfield High are following the colorfully illustrative path laid out by Superman, Spiderman and Spawn.

Well, sort of.

As of yet, they haven't accomplished any Super Hero feats, but they have demonstrated such a high level of artistic expression that Gallery Birmingham is featuring their work, including oil paintings, color-pencil drawings and mixed-media.

For most of their 19 years of life, Adam and Neil have largely been defined by their striking resemblance to each other. Twins in physique and spirit. But not in temperament.

Their art work is perhaps the most stark evidence of what makes each of them truly their own person.

"There's a lot of ignorance about twins," said Adam. "People have a hard time seeing each twin as an individual."

Yin and yang. Searching for their own style.

Competitive spirits

"Everything was a competition when they were growing up," said Barbara, owner of Select Communications and the newly established Artists Development Corp., a firm which handles marketing and public relations for local artists.

"They're definitely fierce competitors. But they're a lot closer than they acknowledge."

When Adam won the Hallmark Award for illustration — one of 5,000 entrants including Neil — Barbara recalls feeling excited and sympathetic.

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Individual: "Self Portrait" by Adam Swaab

SPIRITS OF ANCIENT EGYPT

Alive and definitely cool

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

With the boys dressed in identical red polo shirts and the girls in plaid knee-length dresses, the junior high class from Holy Family School in Rochester moves like a slow, stainless swarm of future archeologists through the "Splendors of Ancient Egypt" exhibit at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

"Grrrooooooss" might not be the typical resounding endorsement the DIA expects from visitors, but it's an honestly favorable assessment from these seventh-graders.

Standing before the display of zanoopic jars, the students are told that the mummification process included removing internal organs — except the heart — and placing the human tissues in these four containers, which would then be put inside the tomb. Perhaps the first recorded notion of "You can take it with you."

"Does anyone know how the Egyptians would remove the brains from the person they

were burying?" asked docent Marsha Gordon of Birmingham.

"They'd take a hook and pull the brains through the nose," Gordon duly noted.

A few students covered their mouths. Others held on to their own noses trying to imagine the gory procedure.

Ancient Egypt. Definitely cool. Bring on the mummies.

Mysterries revealed

Since opening in mid July, "Splendors of Ancient Egypt" has received a long list of accolades from audiences of all ages. Even today's walking mummies, also known as art critics, have been impressed with the expansiveness and meticulous presentation.

At the current attendance pace, "Splendors of Ancient Egypt" is expected to attract 260,000 — a record at the DIA.

As the only Midwestern venue for the timeless — and extremely delicate — exhibit of more than 200 Egyptian artifacts, it isn't much of a hyperbole to point out that this might be a once in a lifetime chance to view the ancient remnants of a sophisticated society. It was a highly productive civilization, claims DIA curator William Beck, obsessed with living, not dying. Yet a society clearly with one foot in the material world and the other on an ethereal plane.

"Splendors of Ancient Egypt" has been imported from the Roemer und Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim Germany. Before coming to Detroit, the exhibit was displayed at the Florida International Museum in St. Petersburg and Houston. The extensive collection includes pieces excavated earlier this century in the Giza necropolis.

After the exhibit's next stop in Portland, Ore., it will return to its renovated museum home in Germany, where it will likely remain through the next few millennium, or the next Predynastic Period.

Exhibited in the transformed 15,000-square-foot contemporary and modern galleries, the exhibit takes up about three times as much space as the DIA's most recent stunning



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHN STORANOWSKI

Ancient wanderings: Joe Morehouse (left), a seventh grade student at Holy Family in Rochester, studies a relic from a world he had only read about in books.

- **What:** Splendors of Ancient Egypt
- **When:** Through Sunday, Jan. 4
- **Where:** Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward, Detroit
- **Exhibition hours:** 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday-Friday; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday-Sunday; closed Monday.
- **Tickets:** All tickets are sold on a timed and dated basis. Ticket holders may enter at any time during the half-hour following the time printed on the ticket. DIA Box Office: (313) 833-4005; Ticketmaster: (248) 645-6666; tickets may also be purchased at the door.
- **Prices:** \$10, adults; \$5, children age 5-12; free, children under 5 and DIA Founders Society members.
- **Tours:** Acoustiguide recorded tour available in English, Arabic and a special children's version, \$4.

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Penetrating glare: Anthrôpid sarcophagus of Amen-em-opef 1490 B.C. with the inscription: "Overseer of the weapons bearers."

EXHIBITION

'Wicked' caricatures expose anti-Semitism in England

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

At the height of the Age of Enlightenment in 18th-century England, deep-seated prejudice cast an ominous shadow on the promise of rationality. Unfortunately, not even the appeals to reason could overcome the effect of pejorative images of Jews living in England at the time.

In a chilling reminder of the insidiousness of bigotry, "The Jew As Other: A Century of English Caricature, 1730-1830," currently at the Janice Charach Epstein Gallery in West Bloomfield, presents an extensive pictorial documentation of how English caricature artists relentlessly demeaned Jews.

The exhibit offers a record of subtle and not-so-subtle images that obviously fortified stereotypes and justified pointing to Jews as scapegoats for societal ills.

"Remember, at the time, there weren't magazines or mass media and illiteracy was quite high," said Sylvia Nelson, gallery director. "An image was as powerful then as it is today. Maybe more so."

This isn't an exhibit of pretty images, although the illustrations are generally well executed. Rather, set within the

spacious first-floor gallery, "The Jew As Other" requires a familiarity with history and a critical understanding of how not taking a stand leads inevitably to a quiet conspiracy of injustice.

"It might seem benign on the surface, but these are the types of images that may have provided an excuse for people not to step in and stop the discrimination," said Rabbi Aaron Bergman of Beth Abraham Hillel Moses in West Bloomfield.

"To come face-to-face with the actual documents is haunting," he said. "It's much more immediate than reading about these attitudes in history books."

The 54 images in the exhibit and their connotations cannot be extracted from the social milieu, according to Dr. Mayor Rabinowitz, librarian at the

Jewish Theological Seminary of America where the prints are stored.

Quite often at the time, the wicked pen of English satire was aimed at the inflated English aristocracy and public officials. Many caricatures effectively served as a foil in an ongoing campaign to pry open a caste system and challenge repressive social attitudes.

Ironically, in many ways, 18th-century England was the most liberal west-



STAFF PHOTO BY DAN DEAN

Gutsy show: Sylvia Nelson, Janice Charach Epstein Gallery director, made a bold decision to display a social and pictorial record of gentile attitudes toward Jews.

ern society. While Jews were expelled from England in 1291 by Edward I, they were readmitted in 1656 by Oliver Cromwell.

By the mid 1800s, the Jewish population in England was a mere 25,000 in a country of 14 million. Yet at the time, Jews had few civil and legal rights.

"Even a relatively progressive society

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