

Egypt from page D1

exhibit, "Images in Ivory," last spring's show of miniature sculptures from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

Schools and groups throughout Michigan, the Midwest and Canada have scheduled tours. On a typical day, as many as two dozen groups, ranging from 15 to 165, will visit the DIA, said Susan Troin, group-tour schedule coordinator.

"Ancient Egypt has a lot of appeal because there's so many mysteries," she said. "This exhibit answers a lot of questions."

Like, for instance, who made the pyramids.

For years, the popular belief was that slaves were used to build the pyramids during the

Old Kingdom Period, 2700 B.C.-2200 B.C. Actually, according to Gordon, workers were hired in a state-subsidized program not too different from the Depression Era public works projects. And while it was widely known that the two main blocks that composed the pyramids were made off site then floated on the Nile to the construction location, it's generally unknown that the workers did not reap the benefit of working with a wheel.

Factors such as 8-ray techniques and a developing hieroglyphic have eliminated many mysteries of Egyptian civilization, from 7,000 B.C. to the Late Period, 712 B.C.-332 B.C.

Yet when considering an early clay pot, miniature animal sculptures or the figurative monuments to the pharaohs and Egyptian nobility, it's only natural to draw comparison to today.

Inevitably, upon viewing the exhibit two questions come to mind: How much different is modern man from his early Egyptian brethren? And, is there any credence to the notion of "progress?"

Not surprisingly, the junior high students from Holy Family had several compelling observations.

"I think in some ways they were more advanced," said student Ann Van Zane. "They were the first ones to figure things out

that we still use today." While student Mike Duzette thinks the mummies were "real weird," he said maybe things haven't changed too much. "They probably died for the same causes that we do today. In some ways, our culture is getting worse because of guns and people fighting."

Global culture

In a rush to write the answers to a list of assigned questions about the exhibit, the students crowded around each display. At one point, the exhibit gallery looked like a living room after a slumber party: students spread along the floor writing their

answers on their study sheets. "Before seeing the exhibit we talked about what it would be like if someone was looking at our civilization," said Nancy Ponitz, social studies teacher at Holy Family. "What would they think (in the far distant future) if they picked up a pencil? an eating utensil?"

For that matter, one can only wonder what our far-distant progeny would think if they unearthed a collection of mawkish Disney figurines? Or an instruction video on disco dancing?

Through the study of artifacts, Ponitz teaches, an understanding of a way of life can be comprehended. One day in class, she

even dressed in Egyptian clothing with a pith helmet as she lectured about the values and customs of the ancient land.

Apparently, the Holy Family students are heeding the advice of George Santayana. The Spanish-born 20th-century American philosopher observed the necessity to learn from the past. In a century of unprecedented violence and world wars, the need to understand history is nothing less than a prerequisite for survival.

"We're a global society," said Ponitz. "We not only take in ancient cultures but need to absorb as many of today's cultures as possible."

Wicked from page D1

is not spared the effects of racial prejudice and stereotyping," wrote Rabinowitz in the Preface of the impressive catalog that accompanies the exhibit.

Caricature or bigotry

Curators Frank Felsenstein and Sharon Liberman Mintz divided the exhibit into eight sections: Jews as money lenders; piddlers; hexers; conversions; Lord George Gordon; Jews and the theater; pork; and, Jews as lovers. Within these subject areas, the major caricature artists of the time seemed to revel in creating a tasteless allegory of Jews based on prevailing stereotypes.

While caricature relies upon

exaggeration and wit, there's scant humor in these prints. On the contrary, all that remains is a raw viciousness that is unsettling even by today's tabloid standards.

For instance, Jews are portrayed as rabid, money grubbing bulls on England's Change alley, location of London's stock exchange. At the time, the number of Jewish brokers allowed on the Exchange was limited to 12.

Then there are series of prints depicting the conversion of Jews to Christianity, and the bizarre notion of Jews secretly yearning for pork and Christian women, including a few drawings of lustful rabbis.

While these subjects are disturbing, there's a certain catharsis by revealing the inherent nonsense of prejudicial attitudes, said gallery director Nelson.

"Some of these attitudes exist today," she said. "To break stereotypes you have to expose them and understand their origins."

In the future, Nelson might depict a broader exhibit about prejudice perpetuated on other racial and ethnic groups. "All ethnic groups have had to struggle for identity and their own individuality," she said.

For those cynical about the influence of a mind set 200 years ago, simply recall that the Holocaust occurred a mere half-century past, and radical supporters of an Aryan nation and Nazism have not abated.

"The reason these prints have preserved," said Rabbi Bergman, "is because they were drawn with venom."

Recently, there was occasion to be equally excited for both of her sons.

Gallery Birmingham owner Richard Laney came to the Swaab's home to discuss his intention of exhibiting one of Barbara's clients. While there, Laney asked about the artist who created many of the works on the family room walls.

Barbara told them there were actually two artists. "Richard (Laney) thought they were accomplished," said Barbara. "He felt their work was ready to be exhibited. He couldn't believe they were just starting art school."

In a twist of fate, it was suddenly a case of a mother serving as agent and promoter for her sons. Weeks later, Adam's introspective oil paintings and mixed-media collage hung alongside Neil's highly realistic color-pencil drawings.

Adam's work is more emotional with a looser composition.

Neil's art is tightly focused, yet equally expressive.

In art, just like in life, there they were. Side by side. yin and yang.

Quest for individuality

Mystical explanations are commonplace among artists. Perhaps the mystery is even deeper when considering the quest for individuality between brothers born on the same day with the same physical characteristics and tendencies.

Seemingly flip sides of the same coin. But not quite.

They both agree that Adam is more vocal while Neil is more introverted. Being more gregarious is part of the reason Adam has recently declared a major in film, an inherently collaborative art. He dreams of becoming the next Tarantino or Gus Van Sant, a Rhode Island School of Design grad who directed "My Own Private Idaho" and "To Die For."

Meanwhile, Neil is content to learn more about the different

mediums, and to "just represent what I see."

From Neil's point of view, he and his brother are "very different." They've always worked in different mediums and Adam's work has tended to be more abstract.

Eventually, Neil concedes, he, too, would like to branch out. Maybe do some writing. And maybe film making. Yang following yin. Or is it yin following yang?

"Well, maybe we're not too different. Eventually we always seem to do the same stuff." And then, he paused as if compelled to state the obvious. "We do have the same genes."

But the Swaab brothers are not quite identical. Just take a close look at their art.

Frank Provensano is an arts reporter for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. You can call him at (248) 901-2657, or send information to 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48009.

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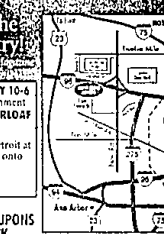
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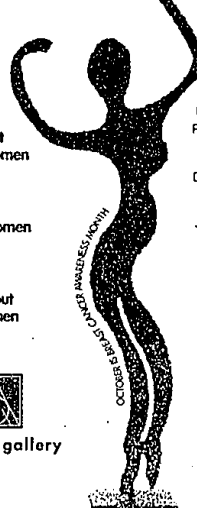
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