

Arts & Leisure

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CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

Lynch's poetic insight of facing the inevitable

Like most published poets, Thomas Lynch keeps a routine so he can find time to write. Receipts from his two books of poems and book of essays haven't allowed him to quit his day job. Not that he'd want to. His secret: he's never far from either of his professions. In fact, he doesn't distinguish one from the other. They're just two sides of the same coin. The descriptive and the indescribable. Ritual and randomness. Life and death.

Each morning, Lynch wakes up early and makes his way to the study in his home where he composes poems and essays.

And then, each day he sets aside his writing, puts on a dark suit and tie, walks next door and takes his place at Lynch & Sons Funeral Home.

For 50 years, the Lynch family has been consoling and burying the members of other families throughout Oakland County.

Thomas Lynch, like his father who established the business in 1948, is a funeral director, mortician and widely

What: Writers Live Literature Series featuring a reading by Thomas Lynch
When: 7-8:30 p.m.
Monday, Jan. 28
Where: Life Jones-Johnson Theater, Oakland Community College, 739 S. Washington Avenue (at the corner of Lincoln), Royal Oak: (248) 540-1540.

respected for the service he provides to families at what is usually the most difficult situation.

Lynch's tact and perspective, however, isn't limited to Oakland County.

He's among the most acclaimed writers in the country.

His recent book of essays, "The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade," was a finalist for the 1997 National Book Award.

The book is filled with Lynch's personal experience of how people have responded to death and dying.

This Tuesday Lynch will read from his book of essays at Oakland Community College in Royal Oak.

Lynch's writing has been called masterful, remarkable, superb, even by those often-times cynical critics from *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker* and *Esquire* who effusively praised the book.

The broad appeal of his book, Lynch explained, is simple.

Nearly everyone has had to deal with the death of a loved one. And nearly everyone struggles to make sense of that other inevitability: beside taxes.

Finding the words
While it's an item of curiosity to think about what writers do when they're not writing, it's starkly apparent where to find Lynch.

He's either walking to clear his mind and find the "voice" of a poem, or he's offering suggestions on how to deal with the finality of death.

When his fellow citizens of Milford see him walking, Lynch doesn't reveal that he's thinking about lines of an unformed poem.

"People around town are aware that I write poetry," he said. "Even those who don't read poetry were nice enough to buy my books."

The former Birmingham resident who graduated from Brother Rice and Oakland University doesn't have a conflicting notion about how he's perceived.

Please see CONVERSATIONS, D2

Coming to terms dealing with our superficial selves

Exhibit explores how fashion shapes identity

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

Maybe it's all the talk about allegations, subpoenas and denials coming out of Washington. Whatever the reason, it's time to face the difficult truth: We're all superficial.

Most of us not only judge a book by its cover, but we buy it, maybe read a chapter and then tell everyone what a great book it is. Why worry about substance when it's easier to be fashionable?

Somewhere between superficial judgments and searching for matching socks is a place where art meets fashion. A checked state of mind examined in Cranbrook Art Museum's "Art on the Edge of Fashion."

In a series of sculptures, photographs and installations, "Art on the Edge of Fashion" slides into an unfashionable world that would make Paris designers shudder. Outrageous is one thing, but fashion that challenges stereotypes, preconceptions of gender and culture is, well, pretty handy stuff.

"This exhibit goes beyond the aesthetics and utility of fashion," said Irene Hofmann, who coordinated the exhibit, which premiered at Arizona State University Art Museum in Tempe.

There's an awareness in the exhibit of how clothing and fashion play a role in shaping identity," she said.

Thankfully, the exhibit doesn't take itself too seriously. There are several tongue-in-cheek reminders that fashion might make us appear hip, but there's no cloaking the truth.

Particularly humorous are Charles LeDra's flag of Ken and Barbie clothing, and Kerrie Peterson's documentation of the wonders of strategically applied makeup.

There's no way Beverly Semmes' elongated arms of her gigantic-sized formal velvet gowns would make the pages of *Vogue*. But they do make a monumental impression.

And then, there's a truly frightening thought: Nick Vaughn's disproportional hodgepodge shirts and slacks make Jerry Seinfeld's glit-swollen "puffy shirt" look like fashionable art.

The funniest, by far, is Vaughn's vision of fashion without pretense, proportion or pride that reveals a world of dorky, Ionesco-like creatures.

What would we be without fashion, asks Vaughn. Hmm. Maybe ourselves. If looking at Vaughn's diskveiled fashion models offers a clue, that's both a relief and a worry.

In an advanced consumer society where fashion trends change almost as rapidly as Dennis Rodman's hair color, "Art on the Edge of Fashion" is as superficial and substantive as American culture itself.

Now that's a dizzying thought.

Fashion is immediate

"Fashion's influence surpasses the white cube of the art gallery," wrote curator Heather Lineberry in the catalog to the exhibit.

"An artist shows a new body of work about every other year compared to the six-month cycle of the fashion world," she said. "Fashion is immediate."

Please see SUPERFICIAL, C2

AT THE GALLERY

Enter Gina's sculptural labyrinth

What: "Gina Ferrari - New Sculpture"
When: Through Saturday, Feb. 28
Where: Revolution, 2325 Woodward Avenue, Ferndale: (248) 541-3444
Hours: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

A few days before her much-awaited exhibit opens at Revolution in Ferndale, and Gina Ferrari has yet to assume the calm resignation of an artist waiting for her work to be judged.

In the days before the opening there's a rush of activity at the gallery that has built a reputation for a rebellious yet urbane attitude.

Ferrari's three sculptural installations are still being put

together. Inspiration has given way to practical deadline realities.

Thousands of pieces that will be incorporated into three installations are packed in boxes and set atop tables.

For now, the many pieces of Ferrari's sculptural puzzles seem like refugees in search of a home. Hundreds and hundreds of plaster casts of human feet, fragile porcelain-like piglets and slithering snakes along with bulbo waxy forms wait to be



Unflattering: Nick Vaughn's photographs of himself in distorted clothing offers a jarring impression of how perceptions are shaped by fashion. (Below) Christine LoRaso created "Boudoir" as a functional and aesthetically appealing chair more suited to the contours of the female body than previous constructions.



Please see GINA, C2



Tree line: Carol Sams' "Morning Birches" is the highlight of "Women on the Edge."

Eclectic, pleasing art at Creative Resource

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

"Women on the Edge" at Creative Resource Gallery in Birmingham elicits a logical question: On the edge of what?

Based on the various mediums used by the four female artists, the sensible answer is that they are pushing the dimensions of quasi-realism, abstraction, folk art and pastels of vivid floral arrangements.

Unfortunately, the title doesn't do the exhibit justice. "Women on the Edge" isn't avant garde or pushing any aesthetic boundaries.

On the contrary, the exhibit is an easily accessible and pleasantly mainstream presentation of works characterized by color, composition, and mostly, design.

Like many galleries looking for ways to maintain a livelihood, Creative Resource isn't easily distinguished by any particular type of art.

Rather, the gallery is an eclectic survey of contemporary art intended to connect with viewers as an accompaniment instrument enhancing a soloist.

Few would have any difficulty "living with" any of the pieces in "Women on the Edge." Whether the art is inspirational is another story.

But some pieces are worth considering.

Foremost, there's the well-wrought oil paintings of Carol Sams. Her series of dreamy impressionistic birches at morning and evening convey a technical mastery and an ethereal accessibility of a Robert Frost poem.

Sams, a Tennessee artist who had a one-person show at Creative Resource two years ago, captures the lush romance of bare birches and their fallen leaves as smeared drops of paint.

In her other paintings, Sams demonstrates a proficiency as an abstract expressionist with an impressive sense of subtle color tones. She also demonstrates a masculine painterly touch in the earthy, Animes.

Interestingly, along side Sams

Please see RESOURCE, C2

What: "Women on the Edge," featuring Jeanne Giveau, Karen Izenberg, Carol Sams, Nancy Schaff
When: Through Saturday, Feb. 28
Where: Creative Resource, 162 Old N. Woodward Avenue, Birmingham: (248) 647-3688
Hours: 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday; 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday.



PHOTO BY JOE VAUGHN

Undertaking: Thomas Lynch offers a front-row look at life's most mysterious inevitability.



STYL PHOTO BY LAWRENCE R. MOORE

At ease: Ferrari's recent work signals an artist growing comfortable with the power of her ideas and the mastery of her craft.