

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

## The poetic genius of Shakespeare

The long lines of ticket buyers at the Birmingham Theatre weren't waiting for the latest high-tech, action-adventure film. They waited to hear the words of the 16th-century English bard of Stratford whose work they probably studied in high school and college, and whose poetry may have seemed more suited to the ivy-covered walls of academia than the rawness of real life.

OK, OK, maybe they waited to see the plucky Hollywood version of the man whose passion, artistry and inventiveness transcends the ages. (Yes, there are sword fights, bawdy repartee and sex scenes.)

With the star appeal of Gwyneth Paltrow, and an utterly engaging screenplay co-written by playwright Tom Stoppard, "Shakespeare in Love" has accomplished what crusty British literature professors could only imagine.

William Shakespeare has gone mainstream without reducing iambic pentameter to a senseless slogan. In Hollywood's best year ever at the



STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZALINSKY

## Blockbuster: Todd Cochran, general manager of the Birmingham Theatre, moved "Shakespeare in Love" to one of the theater's larger venues because of overflow crowds.

box office with 1.46 billion tickets sold (a 5 percent increase from 1997), "Shakespeare in Love" is an encouraging sign that movie-making can reverse the literary past and enlighten contemporary sensibilities.

The movie is arguably the surprise hit of the year, according to Todd Cochran, general manager at the Birmingham Theatre.

**Overflow audiences**

"Audiences are more sophisticated and want well-written, well-acted movies," said Cochran, who compares the instant appeal of "Shakespeare in Love" with last year's endearing hit, "Good Will Hunting."

After the initial showings in L.A. and New York drew sold-out crowds, Cochran realized that he'd better make room for overflow audiences. The movie, scheduled to be shown in one of the smaller venues, was moved to one of the larger screens at the downtown Birmingham complex.

Based on unexpectedly high ticket revenue for the film, theaters in Livonia, Westland, Madison Heights and Southfield are most likely making similar adjustments.

**Layers and layers**

A slow grin spread across Cochran's face as he conceded that more people will learn about Shakespeare through "Shakespeare in Love" than by any college course.

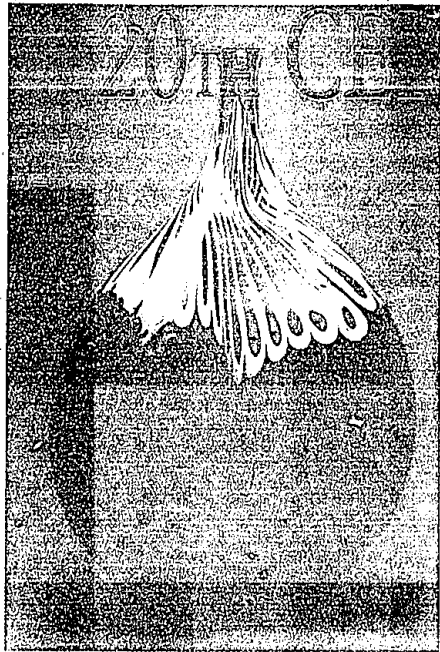
Of course, Hollywood has had other successes when translating Shakespeare to film. Sir Laurence Olivier's "Hamlet," and "Richard III," along with Liz Taylor and Richard Burton in "Taming of the Shrew," and Kenneth Branagh's string of recent films come readily to mind.

But arguably, those films didn't have the lasting power of "Shakespeare in Love," said Cochran. Why? Technology.

With videos and DVDs, the life of a film is being redefined because movies are watched over and over again.

"Accessibility is the key," he said. "Audiences want to laugh, but they also want a good story that stands up

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Studio glass: This vessel by Stephen Powell is on display through Feb. 14 in the Jack and Aviva Robinson Gallery.

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN  
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With the touch of a computer screen, Mary Ann Wilkinson demonstrates the impact. Solvger Dal's Surrealism had on Alfred Hitchcock's films, in particular, the dream sequences in "Spellbound." Wilkinson touches the screen a second time and Dal's imagery appears in a vintage Porky Pig cartoon.

One of six computer stations installed in the newly renovated Modern and Contemporary Art Galleries at the Detroit Institute of Arts, this interactive program is part of a plan to lure visitors into spending more time studying the work of Warhol, Picasso and Matisse.

"What characterizes the 20th century is that artists started looking at art in a different way,"

said Wilkinson, who was named curator of 20th century art in the midst of renovations in August 1997. "It was during the surrealist period, film was beginning to be used as a medium by artists. Looking at Hitchcock's 'Spellbound' and a Porky Pig cartoon, you really realize the impact of Surrealism on artists and culture in America."

Walking through the 20th century galleries, visitors begin to learn there is more than one way to look at art. Wilkinson and education director Nancy Jones planned the galleries with that concept in mind. Both were instrumental in bringing about changes in interpretive labels and instituting computer stations and a hand-held audio tour in the 22,000-square-foot space. The changes didn't come about by accident or a curator's whim. Even before the first brush of paint transformed the 20th century galleries into a well-lit space for viewing the works of Christo, Georgia O'Keefe and Robert

Rauschenberg, the museum polled the public for ideas on how to make the galleries user friendly.

**Renovations**

"It's been an exciting process," said Wilkinson. "We did a visitor's evaluation before and during renovations because we were committed to making this space something people would like to use. So many people are intimidated by modern art because it's so hard to look at. It makes you think. Just as it has done for centuries, people want art to tell a story. So many people are afraid that they won't understand."

Unlike special exhibition audio tours, INFORM, a hand held audio tour, tells visitors about the artist and work of their choosing after entering the number located near a symbol on the work's descriptive label.

"Some people don't want to read, some



Unleashing raw emotion: This Abstract Expressionist gallery features works by Franz Kline (left to right), Barnett Newman and (center) Mark DiSuvero.

BOOKS

## 'On a Good Day' author wrings humor from the mundane

BY FRANK PROVENZANO  
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At times, Gay Rubín admits she wonders if she's crossed the line into her own fictitious literary universe, a place populated by the type of eccentric characters straight from an Anne Tyler or John Irving novel.

For a disciplined writer like Rubín, who explained her need to write is a practice on the level of religious worship, there's a renewed urgency.

"Right now, I feel more compelled than ever about my work," said Rubín of Birmingham. "I want to have an eye-to-eye, heart-



Author Gay Rubín

to-heart relationship with my readers." After decades as a "secret writer" — known as a fiction writer only by a few friends — Rubín has emerged in the last several years as a talented, often-published short-story writer who blends taut, well-crafted plots with rapid-fire prose.

Rubín's latest collection of short stories, "On a Good Day," reflects the playful, stream-of-consciousness swirling narrative breeze that also makes her a charming conversationalist.

In January, she'll begin a book-signing tour that will include appearances at Borders Books in Rochester Hills and Dearborn, and visits to book stores in Boca Raton, Boyton Beach, Fla., and Los Angeles.

**Pursuit of story**

From an unlikely cigar-chomping contributing writer to "Cigar Lifestyles" who wanted to be a singer — but couldn't sing — to a mother of two grown daughters, Rubín's perspective draws on "those special moments" when you can feel the magic of life, she said.

"I want to answer questions that people have about life." And that, for Rubín, means wringing humor from the mundane.

For instance, a clerk at one of Rubín's

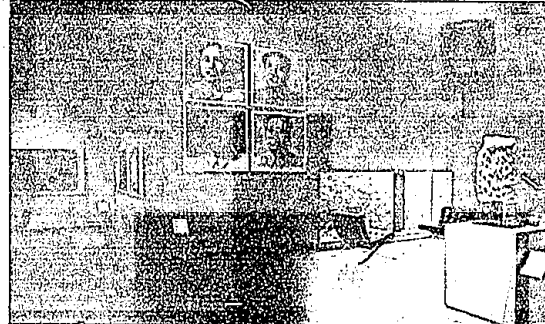


Heart-to-heart: Gay Rubín's newest book has a playful, stream-of-consciousness breeze that will likely settle gently with readers.

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# 20TH CENTURY ART INTERACTION

## Galleries invite visitors to study art and artists



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

New space: One of the DIAs newly reopened 20th century galleries features pop art by Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg, and a seating area to ponder what the artists were thinking when they created the work.

people only want to listen," said Wilkinson. "People learn in a variety of ways. As far as for INFORM, this is the first try to have a hand held audio tour for the permanent collection. In the next several months, we hope to add the rest of the museum."

"It's very experimental," added Jones. "Most museums don't do what we've done. Most audio tours are like listening to an art history lecture. We want to let people know there is more than one way to look at a work of art. On the audio tapes, I give my interpretation, Mary Ann gives her's and then there's a formal analysis."

For visitors who want to go beyond what they see and experience in the galleries, there's an education room stocked with books, tables and chairs, and a computer station. A casual area in the corner of one gallery is for anyone who wishes to read or just sit and contemplate the works of Oldenburg and Warhol.

**Working together**

"It was a very collaborative effort," said Jones. "We wanted to create the kind of an environment that's inviting. We want to give insight into what visitors are looking at and to provide opportunities for them to explore the art. There's more and more research being done on the art experience to make it more exciting, more engaging. We know people like inter-activity, to have the works of art communicate to them."

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