

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

Balancing respect with the need to preserve history

"They paved Paradise, put up a parking lot..."
—Joni Mitchell, songwriter

Well, actually, the talk isn't about building another parking lot. Not literally, at least. The talk is about whether to pave over the studio site of legendary sculptor, the late Marshall Fredericks. The studio is camouflaged by several tall pine trees on Woodward Avenue, south of 14 Mile Road in Royal Oak. Perhaps just another case of "progress" moving relentlessly onward?

Then again, it might be the type of "progress" measured by the construction of yet another chain drug store, fast-food joint or any of the other indistinguishable landmarks of American mass culture.

To many historical preservationists, Fredericks' studio may as well be paradise.

"If you value art and culture, then you'd want to see where the most famous sculptor from our area worked," said Barbara Randau, president of the Royal Oak Historical Commission.

But the struggle to maintain the place where Fredericks conceived of works such as "The Spirit of Detroit" and "Freedom of the Human Spirit," isn't a clear case of "saving history." Especially when it's Fredericks' family that's pushing for the site to be eventually demolished.

Defining public history

Fredericks died last April. His family has sought to have the property, estimated at \$1.2 million, rezoned from residential to commercial.

Two weeks ago, the Royal Oak City's Plan Commission decided not to rezone the 1.7-acre site.

But all parties agree that the issue is far from over.

While there aren't any public bidders for the site, the common speculation is that a chain drug store finds the site to be strategically placed.

By the way, it seems they've also found locations a half-mile and a mile away as "strategic."

Randau, who also serves as a vice chair on the Oakland County Historical Commission, stressed that her supporters respect the Fredericks' family right to gain money from the estate.

"We hope to convince them that their father's property is also a public venue," said Randau.

"Not just to this area, but to the country."

Preserving history isn't an easy task. Just ask those who tried to save the Hudson's Building from the wrecking ball.

The Fredericks family doesn't appear to be persuaded.

According to Randau, it looks like the case of rezoning or not to rezoning is heading to circuit court.

The bottom-line

Meanwhile, the Royal Oak Historical Commission is working frantically to file for a national historical designation on Fredericks' studio.

"The site meets a major part of the criterion — it's the studio of a major artist," said Randau.

Eventually, the commission hopes that with the preservation distinction, the studio can become a museum and gallery dedicated to Fredericks' works.

Those who favor leveling Fredericks' studio point to the Marshall Fredericks Museum at Saginaw Valley State University as the proper place to preserve the sculptor's legacy.

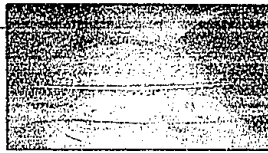
But Randau and her supporters contend that preserving history requires a deeper public understanding about how a community can lose its character if "development" goes unchecked at the sake of "losing historical sites."

"The bottom-line is money," said Randau. "Cities must see preservation as a way of building communities."

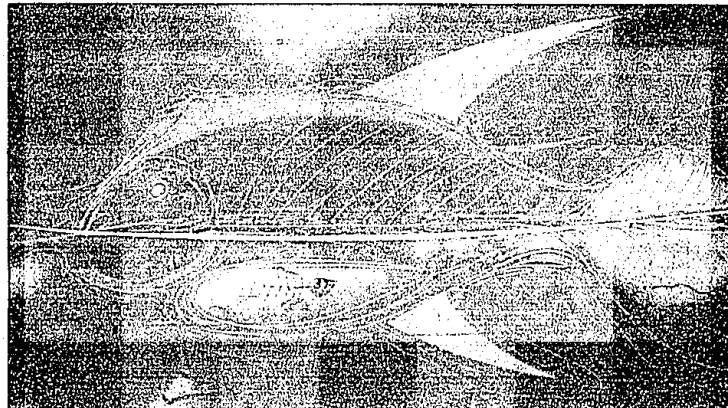
Currently, the historical commission is...

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Flashy, fun and utterly contemporary



Two versions: A metamorphosis takes place when the phosphorescent and acrylic paintings of Paul Louis are viewed under white light (left), then black light (below).



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBOWITZ

POP ART FOR Y2K

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

And now, the long-awaited sequel to the optically drippy 1960s extravaganza "pop art."

No new school of art or official "art movement" is required, just an acronym — VIA: a short-cut reference to Viewer Interactive Art.

With its distinctively Information-Age name, "VIA — Y2K" is making its word-of-mouth debut at the Uzelac Gallery in downtown Pontiac.

While most exhibits appear for three to four weeks, "VIA — Y2K: The Paintings of Paul Louis" will receive a three-month opportunity to catch on.



Painterly: "The Rescue" is one of the compelling, expressionistic paintings of Allen Burke on exhibit at the Uzelac Gallery.

WHAT: "VIA — Y2K: The Paintings of Paul Louis"; and, "The Paintings of Allen Burke" WHERE: "VIA — Y2K," through Friday, April 30; Burke exhibit through Saturday, Feb. 27 WHERE: Uzelac Gallery, 7 N. Saginaw, downtown Pontiac, (248) 332-5257

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday & Saturday; 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Friday

Since gallery owner Chuck Uzelac hasn't found an effective way to advertise the exhibit because of the difficulty of fitting Louis' stylized VIA on a printed announcement card, he's betting that word-of-mouth might turn "VIA — Y2K" into the major surprise exhibit of the winter gallery season.

The word-of-mouth might go something like this:

Long after Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein transformed celebrities and cartoonish logic into the equivalent of tabloid art comes VIA — the next phase in day-glo and inflated sensibilities. Bell bottoms, lava lamps and incense are optional. Black lights and a remote control dimmer switch, by the way, are included in the price of the paintings.

From light to black

"It's totally different, totally new," said Uzelac. "In the art world, those are the qualities that make a difference, especially to trendsetters. Of course, (VIA) isn't for everybody, but what kind of art is?"

Yet, inarguably, VIA is strikingly contemporary.

In a world where consumers want more and more choices, VIA gives control to viewers by running an electrical current through their sensibilities.

Right before your eyes, Louis' acrylic and phosphorescent paintings are transformed with morphic-like illusion with a simple turn of a dimmer switch.

Moving from light to black and vice versa is similar to watching the transformation of an image from a negative to a print. Or in some of the paintings, it's like watching a hologram expand and shrink.

Louis' vibrant colors and easily accessible pop art style evoke a sense of high-energy and ease. There's nothing to "get" about these paintings. They're immediate and engaging.

Several of the paintings depict familiar faces, including an early portrait of Picasso, Michelangelo's

David, a replica of Rembrandt's self-portrait, a magazine-like close-up of Gloria Estefan, and Marilyn Monroe's famous flirtatious pose as she playfully tries to keep her skirt from rising.

Other works are abstract drippings of phosphorescent, acrylic and latex paint combined to have the maximum transformative effect and optical illusion.

Timeless expression

While watching visitors to his gallery marvel as colors rise and fade in response to a dimmer switch, Uzelac said a common VIA experience typically elicits a timeless

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Feeling gritty: The Uzelac Gallery mixes cutting-edge and traditional exhibits. The staff includes Chuck Uzelac, (left), Larissa Funyak and Lisa Konikow.

PRESERVING AN ARTISTIC HERITAGE

Friends keep Polish arts, culture alive



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HARTLEY

Keeping heritage alive: Jane and Edward Wojtan, on behalf of the Friends of Polish Art, recently presented Michael Deller (seated), Livonia's head librarian, with a trilogy of historical novels by Polish author Henryk Sienkiewicz.

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER
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When Edward Wojtan's father fled Poland to avoid being drafted into the Russian army in 1912, there was little time or money to enjoy the performing and visual arts or read historical novels such as Henryk Sienkiewicz's "Trilogy." He worked seven days a week in his butcher shop in the Warrendale area of Detroit to make a life for his family.

Still, immigrants like him sought to keep their culture and the music of Frederic Chopin, Ignace Paderewski and Arthur Rubinstein alive by forming the Friends of Polish Art. Many years later Wojtan and his wife, Jane, also of Polish heritage, joined the group that sponsors annual visual art competitions in the Gallery of Orchard Lake Schools, a bi-annual short story competition, scholarships and performances by groups such as the Krakow Chamber Orchestra to perpetuate Polish culture. As representatives of the Friends of Polish Art, the Wojtans recently donated Sienkiewicz's "Trilogy" and a companion volume to the Livonia Public Library. The Polish novelist, short story writer and journalist was

awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1905.

"We want to foster Polish art and culture and preserve it for generations to come," said Edward Wojtan, a Livonia resident who writes the Friends newsletter. "You should be an American first, but you should know about your heritage and be proud of it."

Halina Ujda, of Birmingham, joined the Friends 40 years ago. Born in Poland, Ujda believes the arts are vital to the human spirit.

"More than anything the arts, whether it's high art or folk art, music or writing, make life worth living," said Ujda, second vice president of the Friends of Polish Art. "It bothers me that when the schools start cutting their budget, the arts are the first to go."

Friends of the arts

The Friends of Polish Art, by hosting the Youth Art Competition in June and the Richard Kubinski Art Competition in October, is not only keeping the arts alive but encouraging the development of artists of Polish descent. Founded in 1937, the group, an affiliate of the American Council for Polish Culture, has

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