

# Childhood shapes haunting sculptures

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN  
LACHAPPE  
lchomin@homecomm.net

Walking around the burlap and resin life-size figures by Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz is eerie, the silence overwhelming. The armless figures undoubtedly allude to a tragic event permanently embedded in her brain as a young girl.

During World War II, Nazis burst into Abakanowicz's family home, on the outskirts of Warsaw, with guns blazing and shot off the arm of her mother. On loan from Bloomfield Hills collectors Gilbert B. and Lila Silverman, the work is one of three installed in the exhibition "Magdalena Abakanowicz: and the Mindless Crowd" at the University of Michigan Museum of Art through Sunday, May 2.

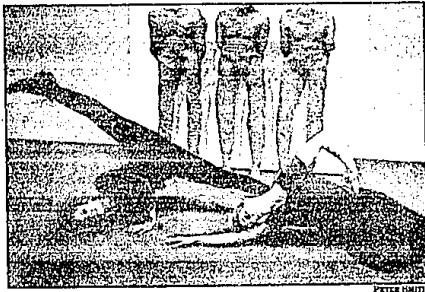
"It's very poignant and moving," said Annette Dixon, the U-M art museum curator who coordinated the exhibit at the request of the university's Center for Russian and Eastern European Studies.

The Center is commemorating Communism's negotiated collapse with "The Polish Roundtable, Ten Years Later" Wednesday-Saturday, April 7-10. The conference gathers the intellectuals, church leaders and politicians, including President Lech Walesa, who participated in the unprecedented events of 1989. Besides the exhibit, the museum hosts an afternoon of new works in theater and dance inspired by Abakanowicz. White Hill, a teacher at Milligan School of Dance in Redford, gathered performers for the program. Dixon will talk about Abakanowicz and her work before introducing dancers and a reading by Plymouth playwright Robert Sulewski Thursday, March 18.

## Losing herself in the crowds

Communism left its mark on Abakanowicz's psyche probably as much as the Nazis did. Abakanowicz witnessed the destruction of Warsaw and the Communist takeover in 1945. Of aristocratic lineage, the nine-year-old girl and her family fled to Gdansk in an effort to lose themselves in the anonymity of the crowd.

"Magdalena was against the regime," said Dixon. "Her art really is a statement about the human condition, the resiliency of the spirit."



Polignant: Atala-Nicole Loud (left) and Jovita Weibel dance as part of a program of new works at the University of Michigan Museum of Art.

On loan from the Des Moines Art Center, "Flock II (1990-91)" stops visitors entering the gallery. Cast from plaster molds of human bodies, the 36 headless and hollow figures is a narrative about crowds. According to a 1998 artist's statement, Abakanowicz's work is meant "to warn, to provoke thinking, to show to people the existential fears common to all of us, the doubts about ourselves, that we all suffer and the fear of crowds carrying the instinct of destruction of themselves and their surroundings."

"It's very poignant and moving," said Dixon. "It's as if they're silent witnesses to something. They're fragile, very vulnerable. There's also the tendency of crowds to act as herds. The crowd is a part of Communism. They're mindless, headless. They have no reasoning faculty to make them think. Interiors of the hollow shells of the figures are as important as the outside surfaces."

Abakanowicz didn't begin making the figures until 1974. Following graduation from the art academy in Gdansk, she painted large-scale canvases before turning to the monumental tapestries which made her famous. Enlarged sculptures of heads about brains run amuck followed. Then came the mindless crowds. The Silvermans, who first saw Abakanowicz's work in the 1980s, have viewed the artist's crowds all over the world. Abakanowicz's three armless figures and another of a

child perched on a chair greet visitors to their home. Abakanowicz only began making children figures after the fall of Communism in 1989.

"We're attracted to it," said Lila Silverman of the installation sometimes numbing as many as 210 adults and children. "We actually loved her armies, the huge stands of headless figures in the field in Italy and others at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and the monumental works in the Rose Garden at the Israel Museum." Abakanowicz's flock reminds Jovita Weibel of refugees. The Toledo, Ohio, resident studied dance in Switzerland (her homeland) and England, before coming to the U.S. five years ago. She is choreographing a piece for five dancers to music by Arvo Part after reading some books about Abakanowicz's work. The dance recalls the refugees Weibel's seen. Atala-Nicole Loud, one of two graduate students in the University of Michigan's dance department, performs it with Weibel, Nicola Gardiner, Erik Blair and Markos Vanzell. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Loud also dances a solo.

"The Flock reminded me of refugees I saw standing around at bus stations in my country," said Weibel, who applied to study at the University of Michigan after learning of professor Peter Sparling and the dance department from a mentor in Switzerland. "It's a very sad piece, the false hope, how people

## "Magdalena Abakanowicz and the Mindless Crowd"

What: An installation of life-size figures by Poland's preeminent artist. Free, but a \$3 donation is suggested.

When: Through May 2. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, until 9 p.m. Thursday, and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Where: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 525 S. State Street, Ann Arbor. Call (734) 764-0395 or visit the web site at [www.umich.edu/~umma/](http://www.umich.edu/~umma/)

### Related activities:

■ "The Mindless Crowd: New Studies in Theater and Dance based on the Work of Magdalena Abakanowicz" 7-9 p.m. Thursday, March 18 in the museum Appa. Tickets are \$7 and available in advance at the museum gift shop. Seating limited, call (734) 647-0521.

■ Lecture — "Polish Art in Search of Freedom," Andra Rotenberg, director of Zacheta Gallery in Warsaw, discusses Polish art in the 1980s especially during the period of martial law, 10:30 a.m. Saturday, April 10 in the museum Appa (free). Part of the University of Michigan's Center for Russian and Eastern European Studies' international conference — "Communism's Negotiated Collapse: The Polish Round Table of 1989, Ten Years Later," April 7-10. Call (734) 764-0351 or visit the web site at [www.umich.edu/~inlet/PolishRoundTable](http://www.umich.edu/~inlet/PolishRoundTable) for more information.

strive for something and are turned back."

Using stories culled from Abakanowicz's childhood in Poland, Hill choreographed a work set to the artist's writings. Before her family fled to Gdansk, Abakanowicz spent many hours alone with nature.

"As a child Magdalena was so drawn to nature," said Hill who teaches dance at Michigan State University this spring. "At the crack of dawn, she would sneak out of her room and would go down to the marsh and commune with nature."

"I never set out to teach, it was just a way to pay the bills," she said.

Living amid the proverbial ivory towers of Cambridge, Mitchnick hasn't forgotten her local roots.

"When I tell people that I'm from Wayne State," they say, "Where?"

"I tell them Deet-troit, that's right. I'm from Deet-troit. It's enough to get you choked up."

### Notable artwork

Top awards in the 18th annual Michigan Fine Arts Competition are:

- First Place — Chun Hui Park of Brighton
- Second Place — Kenneth M. Thompson of Blinfield
- Third Place — Deborah Rockman of Grand Rapids
- Fourth Place — Elise Mittel-Ulanoff of Ferndale
- Fifth Place — Eleanor Clough of Fennville
- Sixth Place — Linda Soberman of Huntington Woods
- Honorable Mention — Lauren Gregersen of Commerce Township, Joyce Willis of East Lansing, and Steve Barber of Harrison

Local artists in the fine arts competition include:

- Beverly Booth and P.J. Gillman of Birmingham
- Danielle Bodine, Laurie Ann Bouley, Lynda Jarman, Ajay Kaura and Fran Wolok of Bloomfield Hills
- David M. Brown and Andrea Tuma of Farmington Hills
- Stephanie Zack of Franklin
- Tom Hale of Northville
- Joseph Maniscalco of Orchard Lake
- Toni Stevens of Plymouth
- Jack Mac Coleman and Margaret Robinette of Troy
- Neil Farkas, Reba Pintzuk and Darcy Scott of West Bloomfield
- Michael Todoroff of Westland

## Flutists from page C1

be glad when you play Mozart's Concerto again." It's basically beginning again," he said.

He's not impressed by jazz flutists.

"Jazz flute players play too quick. I don't know anyone who plays like (Illinois saxophonist) Johnny Hodges or with the intelligence of a Stan Getz or Bill Evans."

Before he gets around to a jazz CD, he has several recording projects, most recently released is "Tango del Fuego," a CD of Latin American music (which he said started out to be a jazz album) and a CD of three new concertos by Lowell Liebermann. He is also working on a CD he will record in May, "Music for My Little Friends," with music often played by student flutists, and a CD of popular music including the theme from "The Titanic."

Rampal still keeps a busy performing schedule and receives excellent notices.

Boston Globe critic Richard Dyer reviewed a performance last year: "Rampal has never sought volume at the cost of other musical goals or at the cost of the natural quality of the flute. His sound is cultivated and eloquent."

But Rampal is recording less and is noticeably disenchanted with the recording industry.

"Nothing very exciting is being recorded. They only want opera singers, medleys and film music," he said. "Maybe it will come back, maybe not. The golden age was when I started my career."

He said he used to record five or six projects a year and is now down to one or two. He said this might reflect changing times and the drive to be current.

"Like the portable telephones, everywhere you go. It's a sort of madness, for what?" he said. "Phones without stopping. Nobody writes anymore, nobody writes letters."

When asked about each other a noticeable chill sets in. Rampal said he and Galway only played together once, "for a film, just a quick performance."

When speaking about doing a jazz recording, Galway mentioned that he considered doing Claude Bolling's suite but decided "it was French '60s music and not very good. I thought I could do better." Rampal's performance of Bolling's suite was one of his most successful recordings.

When the interview with Galway was ending, his Irish humor could resist one last laugh.

"After Ann Arbor, I think I'll go to Detroit and have a party with Jean-Pierre, it's only 40 miles away, right?"

## Conversations from page C1

board of an organization that's losing money."

Since when was money the bottom-line reason to support a community orchestra?

### Heed their appeal

"We're making an appeal for financial and physical support," said Shapero, who noted that SSO is a non-profit, performing at Southfield Pavilion and other local venues.

Who will heed the appeal? To their credit, the City of Southfield provides about \$20,000 to the symphony. That's surely a supportive subsidy.

Apparently, what's needed is a big boost of support.

SSO's future depends on attracting board members who can make the case that a symphony is integral to the musical education of a community.

Considering what Shapero calls Southfield's "rainbow of cultures," he contends there's an opportunity for the SSO to serve as cultural ambassador, playing music indigenous to the city's Jewish, Chaldean, Russian and African American population.

Before that can happen, it's up to Southfield's deep-pocketed corporate community to step up.

Over the years, they've proven that they can respond to a challenge.

### Preserving culture

## 'Fame' comes to Music Hall

The musical "Fame" opens April 27 at Music Hall in Detroit. Individual tickets (\$50-\$27.50) go on sale Monday, March 8.

Tickets can be purchased at the Fox Theatre and Music Hall box offices and all Ticketmaster locations. To charge tickets, call (248) 645-6868 or purchase online at [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com).

Group discounts (20 or more) are available by calling (313) 471-3099. For information call (313) 983-6011.

"Fame" is being presented by Olympia Entertainment and Jam Theatricals in association with the Music Hall Center for

Thanks to a last-minute private donation, there will be a St. Patrick's Day concert on Sunday, March 14. This kind of support offers the best evidence Southfield residents, businesses and city officials can come together to save the 100-member orchestra.

"We're a level above most community orchestras," said Shapero.

Unfortunately, the condition that plagues the SSO isn't unique. Community orchestras throughout the country are struggling to find ways to compete for audiences and funding.

Although the SSO is a classic case of how communities come together to participate and appreciate the arts, the reality is that it's not just about "playing your French horn."

Saving the SSO is ultimately about preserving culture that doesn't come with a click of the remote.

Despite their rhetoric, it's unlikely that the feisty threesome would let the SSO slip away.

But they sure could use some help.

Frank Provenzano can be reached at (248) 901-2557, or at [fprovenzano@homecomm.net](mailto:fprovenzano@homecomm.net)

Or write to: The Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48009

## Spotlight from page C1

attention of Sam Wagstaff (former curator of 20th century art) at the Detroit Institute of Arts.)

The attention, however, was somewhat conditional, said Mitchnick. Quite often, it was the male artists in the Cass Corridor who overhauled Mitchnick and the other prominent female artist of the group, Ellen Phelan.

Throughout the last three decades, however, the Susanne Hilberry Gallery in Birmingham has supported Mitchnick's work. Her recent collection of paintings, "Dogs in the Desert," will be at the gallery through April 3.

Since leaving for the New York art scene in the mid-1970s, Mitchnick has balanced her life as a studio artist with teaching.

**WIN TICKETS from**

Disney  
DOLBY DIGITAL  
Doug's 1st MOVIE  
CREATED BY BOB JORDAN

Send your name and address on a postcard to: O&E Doug's 1st Movie, P.O. box 708 Bloomfield Hills, MI 48303. 25 winners will be drawn at random from all entries received by Friday, March 12. Winners will receive a Family Four Pack to our advance screening March 20. No purchase necessary. Supplies are limited. Employees of the O&E, SFA and BVP are not eligible.

**OPENS FRIDAY, MARCH 26 AT THEATRES EVERYWHERE**

**D & D PROMOTIONS**

**WATERFORD COUNTRY CRAFT & ART SHOW**

150 EXHIBITORS  
WATERFORD MOTT HIGH SCHOOL  
(Scott Lk. Rd. & Pontiac Lk. Rd.)  
MARCH 13 10 a.m.-4 p.m.  
100% of juried handcrafted items  
\$2 admission - under 12 years old FREE  
GIFT CERTIFICATE DRAWING EVERY 30 MINUTES  
COME JOIN THE FUN!

**UPCOMING SHOWS**

May 1.....Clarkston's New High School  
July 3.....Clintonwood Park, Clarkston  
July 23/24.....Waterford Civic Center  
July 31.....Grand Blanc High School

For More Information Please Call (248) 620-0166

**HOMEOWNERS WANTED!!!**

KAYAK POOLS is looking for demo homesites to display our new "MAINTENANCE FREE KAYAK POOL!" Save thousands of \$\$\$ with this unique opportunity!

**CALL NOW!!**

**LIMITED OFFER**

**Dreaming of a Pool...?**

**1-800-31-KAYAK**  
[www.kayakpools.com](http://www.kayakpools.com)

40 YEARS OF SERVICE