A Season of Afro-American Art History
by Helen Shannon

During the summer months of 1983, Detroiters had the opportunity to view a selection of work by Black artists of a breadth not seen before in this city. Folk and professionally trained artists having local, regional, and national reputations and working in styles both conservative and innovative that date all the way from the early part of this century to the present—a full spectrum of Black contributions to the visual arts was available in both museums and galleries. Had this confluence been planned, it would have been applauded as a first step toward making available a full history of Afro-American art to the Detroit community. Instead, the availability of this wide selection was fortuitous and probably went unnoticed by many.

The impetus for the folk art exhibitions held at the Feigenson and Hill galleries was the presentation at The Detroit Institute of Arts of Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980. This show was organized by the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., and although not as comprehensive as its title may appear introduced an area little-covered by art historians. For reasons not entirely clear, the exhibition did not include several well-known folk artists such as Horace Pippin, Clementine Hunter, and Bruce Brice. The twenty artists in the show, from the well-known William Edmondson and Elijah Pierce, to those just developing national recognition, such as Jessie Aaron and George White, demonstrated the great variety of styles present among these people whose inspiration, often attributed to God, is their only motivation. They sought neither fame nor fortune as continued on page 4.
Letter to the Editor

The Detroit Focus Quarterly encourages correspondence. Letters will be edited to meet space limitations.

Each time an artist becomes a critic, his likes and dislikes become very clear. There is no way around this. The interview of Peter Plagens in the last Quarterly helps us understand his selections and his thought process [and begins a dialogue between artist and critic/jury. It's not just another rejection without reason.

"I don't think what we might call the 'crafts' has had a whole hell of a lot to do with the philosophical development of 20th century art." Plagens says. This is like saying, "Oh, don't mind that leg, it's not important to walking..."

The rejection of so-called "hommages," "sexual fantasies," and "on purposeness" is fine only as long as the artist knows why. What good does rejection do the artist most of the time? Most of the time it only angers him into thinking he is right. He continues to paint these paintings out of anger and an "I'll show you" attitude. The rejection does little for an artist's growth unless he knows why. Then perhaps he/she can reach deeper inside him- or herself to grow as a visual artist, not be left in limbo and rejection.

But to say that Detroit is not "painting town," strikes me as a little careless and callous "it was singularly struck by the poyness of the painting." Can one really judge the course of painting in one jury sitting? This would be like seeing only Poinsettia and saying that it is Impressionism in a nutshell. I hope Plagens took a look around at what other Detroit artists might be looking at, and I doubt he took the time.

Joy Colby in the Detroit News suggested that perhaps the problem was the juried group show, which doesn't prove anything and can be deadly dull. "Sometimes, I don't feel the problem is that at all. [Cutting back on juried group shows] would only make matters much worse in the artist's search to be shown."

For many artists, this is the avenue to their own shows and galleries and to the public eye.

Perhaps the problem of Detroit's non-painting town image is more deeply rooted. As Marsha Maro said in "The Dilemma of Modern Art at the D.L.A.:" [Detroit artists] lack "constant accessibility to a Picasso or a Penn." This lack does not help young visual artists who need this accessibility to test their ideas and concepts against. More work of modern artists like Jackson Pollock, Jasper Johns, and Peter Mendelson would not leave so many artists painting in the darkness of rejection and limbo.

Christopher A. Biebske

Artists' Viewpoint

Bob Sestok

Note: Bob Sestok's Artist's Viewpoint consists of excerpts from conversations between the artist and the editor that have been collaboratively collaged together.

Detroit artists continue to achieve what we can achieve with what we have at hand. That's the struggle of being a Detroit artist: limited resources, not enough support. I'm not just saying Detroit, but Michigan, and through the Midwest; it's the same all over the place. At least we still have a Michigan Council for the Arts. They might just drop the arts council altogether in Chicago. And this is Reagan's policy: cutbacks.

A lot of people think artists are bums, but that's not always the case. A lot of artists turn into bums because they've been worn out from years and years of putting their hearts and souls into something that doesn't pan out because there's no support.

I've never had any grants, although I've applied twenty-five times. But the thing about that money is that it helps you to buy new tires for your truck. That's what most people do, actually, with the money. You think it goes into the arts. No, it doesn't; it goes into your life, and that's not bad, but the thing is, for the guys who don't get it, it doesn't matter anyway, so what are granting organizations trying to prove?

The problem is that Detroit is provincial, and people do not support creative thinking in the way that they do when you have the momentum of the press and the critics. The economy's so bad that people aren't buying art. They are, but they're buying investments; they're not taking chances like they used to.

And the art scene is so goofy today. I think that everybody's gone crazy. The kids today are trying to make a career out of art as an industry. They think, "Well, I'm going to market my stuff, and I'm going to get rich, and I'm going to go into a gallery, or I'm going to mass-produce a bunch of stuff, and I'll be rich and famous." The galleries have even orient themselves to this corporate ideal. In the beginning when I was in art, I never had that kind of situation. There were community galleries available (and there will always be that). But then you take it up to a higher level where the gallery is functioning as a business, and it really takes away a lot from the artist. What happens is that you peak out; your circuits get overloaded. You reach a point where you're up at the top of the ceiling, and there isn't any other place to go, so you have to do an about-face and re-evaluate your ideals and start all over again. After twelve years, I'm starting to get looked into something that I can't get out of: multimedia work. I'd love to get some canvas and go make a painting, but if I want to make art, and I want to eat, I can't afford to do both, I have to make a decision: Do I want to make art and eat, or do I want to make art and starve? I might be wise to make art and starve, except for the fact that I wouldn't live very long. I am trying not to compromise on the art — and I think a lot of others are too.

But people are squeemish about looking at something that they consider to be ugly. I'm talking about things that are beautiful in the sense that they are not perfect; beauty doesn't have to be just perfect, and that's what the little old ladies buy, and that's what the people want. They want things. "Oh, yes, I'm going to cherish this forever." That kind of thing. And I say bunk to all that.

But in a sense I think that everything I do has a feeling about be-
ing beautiful, although it might not seem like that. It's a hard word to deal with, "beautiful." Somebody comes up and says, "Oh, that's really beautiful," and you think, "God, what are these people talking about, what do they know? I made the damn stuff, and it's not really beautiful." I say that it's correct, or that it has the right feeling, or something like that. Some of my early collage pieces were not really beautiful, they were correct; they were right for the problem; they gave the right message out. Beauty has a lot to do with putting out the right message, or being on the right frequency — something that has to do with the energy flow out of the work. You can sense that, feel that, and people mistake that for beauty. Beauty and beautiful are a way of being.

And another thing: I see things in a clear light, and I see things in good perspective to my relationships, to my environment, and I try to forecast the truth about my reality. But the critics do not support me. I'm not, I guess, an attractive figure for them to comment on. I think that some of my cohorts have gotten a lot more air play than I have. And I'm kind of angry about that. But I just shrug my shoulders and go, "Oh, well, that's the way life is. I'm not an accepted artist."

For the past five or six years, the curators of modern art at the D.I.A. have just failed horrendously at making an assessment about modern art. I consider my work to be in the category of modern art. I am a modern survivalist. I'm still alive. I think that we should really spend more time and effort with the artists who are alive. We've spent so much money on computers and baseball players today; why can't somebody do something for art? I would like to see Michigan art exhibitions reinstated in the museum. There are a lot of enthusiastic young artists putting out an awful lot of energy. That's why we have to have the Michigan art shows back, so people can be given a chance in that kind of competition. The shows shouldn't be put on so that they require such a high overhead. We used to have art shows in the Forsythe Building with fifty artists, and the cost was $200 to put the show on; the museum spends $200,000 to put on a show with fifty artists. The politics is all screwed up. Either they don't have any sense of reality, or they have a better sense of reality than I do! I'm not knowledgeable about administration, and the people who run the museum are administrators. If I were going to point a finger at them, I would have to know what I was talking about. But I'm certain that to turn on the lights in the gallery and have the guards sit there doesn't cost that much money.

The museum can only do so much; but there's such a misuse. I would not put so much money into architecture as they have done to refurbish the place, and rearrange it, and make it a nice space for the collectors to visit. I think that I would be more concerned with acquiring good art to be on display in the city's public place. Let the art speak, not the installation.

I'm simple; I'm a simple person. I like basic things, functional things. I do very poorly at communicating to a large audience. Every time I do something, I try to stick my neck out. I always regret it later on. I guess I go for the throat when it comes down to statements I want to make. But that's inevitable; I can't change that. It's animal instinct. What I would hope is that people who are a little hard of seeing or hearing would re-evaluate or reassess their ideas about their attitudes or ways of thinking. If that doesn't happen, I guess I'm not going to change anything.

I ask a lot of my friends questions about things like why they're living where they're living, or what they expect to do in the future. I'm always questioning people on that and trying to reassure myself that I'm not alone in this mess, that there's somebody out there who's going through the same experiences that I am. If I lived in small-town America, I think I would work on cars all day long and have a nice car.

I don't go to the golf course; I don't play golf. I like going on boat rides. I don't jog, but I love to throw horseshoes.

Photo: Kathryn Luchs
Continued from cover

artists, but produced art only from an internal compulsion. Their work emphasized a simple fact about folk artists that the average museum visitor often found difficult to comprehend: that they have the same innate ability to make art as do professionals, but lacked the opportunity to study in an academic setting. In visiting these three exhibitions, I was struck by the ability of these artists to fashion lives of strong aesthetic intent despite the deprivations of poverty, racial discrimination, and cultural isolation from the mainstream of American culture. Their works prove that the will to make art is indomitable and that all manifestations of that desire, whether they be oil paintings on canvas or sculpture made of bubble gum, should have equal critical consideration.

The show at the Feigenson Gallery presented many of the same artists seen at the DIA (William Dawson, Inez Nathaniel-Walker, Elijah Pierce, Mose Tolliver, and Joseph Yoakum). The Hill Gallery presented some of these same artists, as well as Bill Traylor and Josephus Farmer. This show also included anonymous quilts, pottery, furniture, and canes. Several pieces, the canes in particular, raised the still unresolved question of the relationship between Afro-American arts and their African antecedents. The gallery acknowledged this debate by displaying the canes with several African staffs that were similar in their basic design, a long wooden shaft topped by a carved image. Scholars are still discussing the nature of this relationship, which is more tenuous in the visual arts than in music, for example. This small part of the Hill Gallery exhibition was provocative in stating through example the essential question: what kinds of ties exist between the arts of Africa — including carving, casting, pottery, and weaving — and similar crafts practiced in the Americas? The show also reminded one that the Corcoran's Folk Art exhibition was limited to objects that fit into the two major categories of Western art, painting and sculpture, and did not include any of the "decorative arts."

From discussions with many visitors to the DIA exhibition, it appeared that one criticism of the museum's show was that these works of untrained artists were seen in an historical vacuum since the DIA has never had a major group show of Black professional artists. Conversely, the museum has not recently had an exhibition of folk art by any other Americans. As a result, the general public was sometimes at a loss to put the works in a proper critical context, often feeling that the exhibition perpetuated the stereotype of Blacks as child-like, uneducated, unsophisticated people. However, during the early summer, several galleries did present the work of professional artists. One rare opportunity was available at Your Heritage House, which held an exhibition of the paintings and drawings of a type of artist seldom seen on the museum and gallery circuit. Edwin A. Harleston was a Beaux-Arts trained portrait painter whose career was truncated by an early death in 1931, just at the time when Black artists began to be affected by the inroads of Modernism. Harleston was essentially a society painter whose potential patrons, a Black upper- and middle-class, were too few to support him. His work, admitedly conservative, provided a great contrast to the folk artists, but also proved the great diversity that has always existed in Black society. On the one hand was a college-educated man who spent six years at the School of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and who was constantly frustrated in his attempt to be solely supported by his talents, on the other hand were people who had not had a proper education in the segregated South and who never attempted to become professional artists. Harleston's work also indicated that there is an academic tradition among Black artists which has been hidden from recent public view for the same reason that other artists have been given little critical notice: academic work has been discredited for several generations because of the impact and prestige of Modernism.

This behind interest in the works of Black academic artists is intriguing given the fact that the history of Afro-American art, even in recent decades, is strong in representational artists. During the insurgece of Abstract Expressionism in the forties and fifties, Black artists continued making the human image the focus of their work. The oeuvre of Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, Hughie Lee-Smith, and others is indicative of the unwillingness of the generation that matured in the thirties fully to accept non-objective work as a style. There are still many Black artists who continue in a representational mode, often for ideological reasons. Many belong to the National Conference of Artists, whose local chapter held its annual Art Fair on Washington Boulevard in mid-July. For some of them, art is a means of communicating political and social ideas to the Black community, rather than a vehicle for indulging in individualism. For that reason, these artists continue a tradition of placing the human figure in a prominent position in their work. Many of the N.C.A. artists also develop a style that identifies with African cultures. As a result, they are, perhaps consciously so, outside the mainstream of contemporary art and find it difficult to show in commercial galleries. The N.C.A. Art Fair has become a way of presenting their work to the Detroit public. Of those working in a totally figurative style, Jon Lockard, Carl Owens, and Ron Scarborough are the most accomplished. Pervis Hawkins and Dwight Smith are developing in a completely abstract mode, while Shirley Woodson's collages fall between these two methods.

Two Black-owned galleries had shows that illustrated the catholicity of styles developed by Black artists. Jazzonia Gallery offered a two-man exhibition of works by Allie McGhee and McAthur Binion. McGhee showed paintings, drawings, and a few constructions that demonstrated that he is still exploring the possibilities of joining diverse materials into a harmonious whole. In his earlier work, this consistency was sought in muted pastel colors found in paint, paper pulp, seeds, and other materials that suggested a natural palette. In his newest work, the reds, blacks, greens, and yellows are strong and brilliant, but the emphasis is still on the process of applying the pigment — whether it is acrylic, enamel, or pencil — to the surface. Binion's paintings, made of a crayon-based medium, often contrasted twin images of the same object in different colors or positions. His emphasis on the textural qualities of the thickly applied crayon stressed the process of making his paintings, while the use of recognizable images — a gun, a car — provided a contrast to McGhee's abstract work. The balance of their similarities and differences made for a thoroughly satisfying show.

Pittman Gallery, recently moved from the Renaissance Center, inaugurated its new space on the refurbished Washington Boulevard with a show of twelve Michigan artists, several of whom were Black. Some of them have shown recently. Charles McGee and Lester Johnson had works in Focus Gallery's 6th Silverman Selects in the spring. Yolanda Sharpe has also been seen during the past year at Jazzonia. Two painters who have not been seen lately are Harold Neal and Al Hinton. Neal's two works presented another Detroit artist trying to grasp the beauty inherent in urban grittiness. Each painting combined a rich surface of strong colors and various textures united by a plaster-like material onto which were scribbled the graffiti of words, numbers, and musical notations. Al Hinton's paintings were atmospheric, rather than earth-bound, offering applied strips of painted canvas floating through a gray background invaded by mists of white.

We can only hope that the next comprehensive showing of work by Black artists will be more deliberately organized and expertly publicized so that a full survey of work can be seen by the whole art community.
In the last issue of DFQ, Peter Plagens remarked that what we call the crafts hadn’t “a whole hell of a lot to do with the philosophical development of 20th century art.” As a painter in a constant state of moral outrage, I had intended to use the ideas from a few people from Michigan’s crafts community to expose the tyranny of this statement. I found out things are more complex than I had thought, and these people provided me with too much informational meat to let rot in my own conceptual cupboard. Herewith a scrambled synopsis of two conversations. The first was held at Pewabic Pottery with Tom Phardel, head instructor, Monica Dewey, gallery manager, and Mary Jane Hock, Director. Second, I spoke with Ferdinand Hampson, director of Hatat Gallerie.

**Maybe the crafts haven’t had much influence, but so what?**

Hampson: “I think what [Plagens] is addressing is that a difference developed and the crafts or decorative arts were relegated to different areas [than the fine arts], and probably rightfully so. People were using them for functional objects, they were using them for pure decoration, but not so much for the aesthetic values people were placing in painting.”

The consensus also seemed to be that this division occurred due to technical considerations. Until recent times, technical barriers were so formidable that in some craft fields many people thought of artistic concerns only secondarily. Technical advances in about the last 20 years have filed at the shackles until as Phardel states, “. . . craftspeople no longer ask, ‘How do I get it?’ but, ‘I can get it, now what do I want to do with it?’”

**Verbal tyranny**

First and most obvious is that the label “craft” can be used to negate any artwork merely on the basis of its medium. Dewey: “If the artist puts that label on it maybe it’s not judged as fine art.” Which brings up an interesting point. Craft terms can also be used as defense mechanisms. Phardel: “Clay people are no longer confined to the rules they used to be and in order to be treated on a level with other artists they can’t hide behind the label ‘ceramic sculpture’. That’s what they did in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s. You could say, ‘I think the scale’s all wrong,’ and they’d say, ‘This is clay! Whataya want?’ I think if clay people want acceptance, they have to play the game and accept the consequences if their work isn’t very good as sculpture.”

Hampson sees the art/craft division as primarily an American phenomenon. In the Eastern Bloc, for example, famous craftspeople get the same kid-glove treatment as painters. He’s heard of trains being rerouted to assure their stars a constant supply of materials. No class distinction is made between art and craft.

According to Phardel, there is also a large gap in the ability of most craftspeople to defend their work verbally. From the Pewabic conversation:

Phardel: “Most craftspeople aren’t as educated verbally, whereas in painting and sculpture they’re very aggressive verbally, and you can go miles with verbal communication.”

Dewey: “Is that because they’ve been educated to be critics, too, whereas craftspeople haven’t been?”

Phardel: “Probably. But maybe there hasn’t been the want or need to be on an equal level. Now if craftspeople want their work to be considered with that of painters and sculptors, they have to go a little further and communicate why this is equal.”

Hock: “Not why this is equal, why this is important!”

Phardel: “And verbally most craftspeople are very far behind, because they haven’t had to deal with this until maybe the last 10 years.”

**Critic shortage**

Phardel: “There aren’t many ceramic critics. There are hundreds of painting critics . . . So when you open up art magazines, clay is rarely mentioned, therefore you don’t take it seriously. I think it’s also a problem of, ‘Who do you find competent enough to say something intelligent about a material like clay or glass?’”

Hampson: “It’s almost an intimidation factor, because there’s some understanding about technique . . . and about [the crafts’] own history that has to be taken into consideration before a person can make a really accurate judgment about a piece of clay or glass . . .”

One thing Phardel feels has made the mass media more open to craft criticism, is the gradual movement to art criticism that is more purely descriptive in nature.

**Incest!**

One block to acceptance, Hampson feels, is that craftspeople are clanish. He asked me sarcastically, “I mean, how many painting conferences have you been to? People will come from all over the country — all over the world! You hold a crafts conference and they’ll RUN to it! I was in Madison, Wisconsin. I was visiting a very well-known painter there, and there was a crafts conference on at the time, and I was also attending that. I said to him, ‘C’mon! We’ll go to these places.’ He’s from Yugoslavia, and he’s just looking baffled. He was even going out of his way to pick up hitch-hikers so he could question them, and he’d say, ‘Why are all you people here in Madison?’ ‘Well, we’re-at-this-conference—n-we’re-watching-people—n-disseminating-information—n-everything . . .’ He’d let ‘em out, and he said, ‘We could call a painting conference and people wouldn’t come from around the block!’

“You’ve got your craft magazines, your craft clans, your craft departments . . . as long as that kind of caste structure goes on there’ll never be . . . acceptance [for craftspeople], because you can always run back to your own world.”

This is great stuff to know . . .

. . . but there are still some things I don’t get. Why does an overworked gimmick in glass by Harvey Littleton remain relatively obscure, while a gimmick in Lucite equally beaten to death by De Wain Valentine (Remember him?) gets rubbed in our faces as “American Art of the 20th Century?” Why is the work of Miro in his rigorous mortis more significant, or any Rothko more transcendental than a Hamada pot? The answers are not just found in the issues stated above, but in the nature of quasi-functional form. The New York market has fed people a perversion of Modernist philosophy which honors artworks only to the extent that they pretend to negate the history of their media. When a vessel form or woven surface is used as an advanced formalist vehicle, it also states its own genealogy in a way the painter’s rectangle never can. Unfortunately, in order for the crafts to receive market and media validation, there must not only be a significant number of artists doing genuinely progressive work, but a greater number of quasi-futuristic showmen.

James Kirchner is a local artist/painter.

*Are The Crafts Getting a Bum Rap?*  
by James Kirchner  

Incest!
The Michigan Council for the Arts is making changes in some grant categories, guidelines, and deadlines. The categories most affected are Pilot Projects — which will be incorporated into Developmental Arts — Arts Outreach, and Operational Support. If you have previously applied under one of these categories, or if you think you might be eligible to apply under new guidelines, be sure to contact the Council offices at 256-3717 after October 1, when all of the new information will be available.

The Bank of Commerce, at 11300 Joseph Campau in Hamtramck, announces Ethno-Art '83, a juried competition leading to the purchase, by the bank, of six works valued at up to $1000 each. Entries should reflect "the rich ethnic heritage that has . . . contributed to the cultural well-being of Hamtramck, Detroit, and Michigan for the past two centuries . . . and the rich human and material resources that have created and sustain it as part of the American scene." The deadline for slide entries is October 24. Phone 356-3200 for detailed information.


The free publication Michigan Art Fairs, compiled by the Michigan Council for the Arts, is a practically exhaustive guide to over 300 visual arts fairs and festivals held around the state. The deadline for submitting listings for the 1984 directory is November 1. Call (313) 256-3732 to get the proper form.

The Michigan Art Bibliography is an excellent annotated survey of books and articles published since 1980. Now in its second volume, it should be invaluable for students doing papers, for collectors who want information on a specific artist, for people interested in hard-to-research subjects such as folk art, furnishings, or interior design, and for Michigan history buffs — as well as for anyone else interested in art in Michigan. It's free from the Michigan Department of Education, State Library Services, Box 30007, Lansing, MI 48909.

The Census Bureau and the National Endowment for the Arts report an 81 percent increase, during the decade 1970-1980, in the number of people classified as artists, with the Southeast experiencing the greatest gains. Artists now constitute 1 percent of the nation's civilian labor force, and no state has less than half of 1 percent of its population working as artists. California, New York, Texas, Illinois, Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan, in that order, are the states having the largest numbers of artists, but of the top eight, only New York, New York, and Florida are above the national average in the percentage of artists in their total civilian labor forces. As a region, the Midwest now has fewer artists and a smaller percentage of artists in its population than any other part of the country.

The number of employed artists has declined, however, for the first time since 1971, when the Bureau of Labor Statistics first began keeping nation-wide records. The percentage of unemployed artists in 1982, the most recent year for which figures are available, stands at 4.5 percent for architects, 4.9 percent for painters and sculptors, 5.2 percent for designers, and a whopping 5.4 percent for photographers. The raw figures are more appalling. Between 1980 and 1982, the number of unemployed architects jumped from 2000 to 4000; of unemployed painters and sculptors from 4000 to 11,000; of unemployed designers from 5000 to 12,000; and of unemployed photographers from 3000 to 6000; that's a total of 33,000 highly trained visual artists who should be making a valuable contribution to the nation's cultural life, and aren't. The picture for the photographers is particularly bleak. Although the number of jobs increased between 1980 and 1982 for all other categories — even reacing an all-time high of 211,000 jobs for painters and sculptors in 1981 — the number of jobs in photography declined from 111,000 to 96,000 over the same period.

The states increased their funding for the arts for fiscal 1983 by an average of about 3.2 percent, but this is less than the 9 percent average increase experienced in both 1981 and 1982. Only Alaska, New York, and Hawaii had legislators who appropriated more than a dollar per person for state support of the arts.

U.S. territories are more lavish with funding for the arts than the states are. American Samoa, the Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands allocate more than a dollar per resident for the arts. Even Guam, appropriating only 87 cents per resident for the arts, is ahead of 45 of the states on the mainland. Of course, the District of Columbia allots more than a dollar per person to the arts, but the standard of living there is subsidized to a considerable extent by you and me.

Pewabic Pottery officially opened its new sculpture garden on August 20. Tom Phardel's conception was realized "straight out of the backs of the people around here," according to Pottery Director Mary Jane Hock. The garden makes it possible to look at a wide range of ceramic sculpture in a setting that is a little out of the ordinary. Check with the Pottery, at 822-0554, for viewing hours.

The Michigan Friends of Photography and the Detroit Public Library co-sponsor a gala reception in honor of the opening of On Reading, an exhibition of 60 photographs by Andre Kertesz. The benefit takes place in Adam Strom Hall in the Main Library in the Cultural Center on Friday, October 28, from 7 until 10 p.m., and is designed to raise funds to increase the Library's collection of photography books. Tickets are $5 for general admission, $25 for patrons, and $100 for benefactors; advanced reservations can be secured by calling 833-4043, although tickets will also be available at the door.

An Apology

You may have noticed that Peter Manschot's photographs of Benny Andrews and Peter Plagens in the June, 1983 issue may have looked a little like they were taken in an orange grove during smudging season; or that the photographs of work by Joe Zajac, Shirley Parrish, and Steve Rost were badly over-inked. You may even have noticed that David Griffith's photograph was not printed full frame, but was cropped by a quarter of an inch and surrounded by a mourning band. The editorial staff would like to apologize to these artists for the misrepresentations of their work that were printed in many copies of that issue, and to assure them and our readers that we will guarantee high quality reproduction of art work from the current issue forward. As noted in the Staff credits our new typesetter and printer is Grigg Graphic Services.
Otis Sprow
The Detroit Public Library
Photogallery
Detroit

The Movie, a show by the Detroit-area photographer Otis Sprow, is the largest one-man exhibition shown at the Detroit Public Library's Photogallery since it began exhibiting photographs in 1968. The artist presents a complex and serious work that was created in the confines of an abandoned mental health facility, but is not without an element of fun.

The show consists of a series of fifty pieces, each made up of more than one image. Diptychs, triptychs, and quartets are placed in a specific sequence to guide the viewer's perception and understanding. Taken out of context, the works lose much of the artist's intended meaning. We owe a debt of thanks to Dorothy Manty, who coordinated the show, for her sensitivity in preserving the unedited version of The Movie.

The directorial method is a new approach for Sprow. While still maintaining the exceptional technical and compositional quality he learned from Ann Arbor's Howard Bond, he has moved from beautiful landscapes to highly competent conceptual imagery. He arranges not only the sequence, but also the settings he photographs and is committed to illustrating ideas while retaining an element of childlike fantasy.

Sprow shot The Movie on location using available props and an occasional extra. Yet his images show little of the depressing world we normally expect in a mental health facility. Though the works are often devoid of actual life, they are highly animated. Sprow takes the liberty of making beds dance and flowers grow — after all, he is the director.

Sprow frequently alludes to freedom in the series. Over and over he illustrates the desire for freedom, the desire of those who once lived in the institution to escape. One fanciful depiction of escape is a diptych called "Runway for S. Claus, Superstar." In the first image we see a cardboard Santa Claus pinned to the wall. The second image adds a "runway" (made of tape) for Santa's departure. Because he is imaginary, he comes and goes as we please.

The freedom of imagination is ever-present. Though the people in this institution were not free to leave, they were free to rearrange thoughts as they pleased. In "Months Normally Ordered/Months Alphabetically Ordered," time transforms under a different form of logic. "Flowers of Manmade Kind" has flowers sprouting from what is a bare wall in the first image. In this world, things that do not normally happen, can.

Even more, Sprow reveals his own newfound freedom, through turning away from the constraints of purist photography. He changes from the cumbersome 4 x 5 view camera format to a more manageable 2 1/4, which he alludes to in "The Unconstrained Growth of Rectangles Within Squares." In addition, his imagery becomes more personal.

"It's dangerous when you photograph ideas because you expose yourself," Sprow contends. In this show, he opens himself by exploring hope, chance, and the human need for freedom.

In a work this large, there are bound to be pieces of varying quality. Though there are clearly "sleepers" (as the artist refers to them), Otis Sprow has demonstrated his ability to direct a very complex work while leaving room for almost limitless interpretations.

Julie Nelson holds a curatorial internship in the Department of Photography at the Art Institute of Chicago while completing her studies for a Master's degree in History of Art and a certificate in Museum Practice at the University of Michigan.

Kevin Houtari, Patrick Burton, Karen Finley, and Harry Kipper
Willis Gallery
Detroit

I love Karen Finley! This performance artist is a one-woman whirlwind of sight, sound, and insanity, who snatches up her audience and works it as if it were silly putty. In "To Eat a Child," food gets thrown all over the place, as Finley screams, "Say yes to Michigan!" while dunking her face in a bowl of Battle Creek-made Froot Loops, or stuffs artichokes into her blouse while denouncing suburban snobbery. "Give me a dirty city!" she cries. In the course of her presentation, she takes on the wildly crazed...
are delivered with such effectiveness that psychobabbling, a vocalization of the bits of personalities of Father, Mother, and Child, exploring all the nightmarish aspects of family relationships.

I am particularly impressed by Finley's psychobabbling, a vocalization of the bits of pollution in all our streams of consciousness. Random remarks ("I hate people who blink too much") come from nowhere and are delivered with such effectiveness that they are devastatingly funny. Her attention wanders from making lunch to her father's suicide to paranoia and back again in all-too-human fashion.

Karen Finley's schizophrenic social satire was part of two diverse evenings of performance art hosted by Patrick Burton at the Willis Gallery last July. Besides pieces by Finley and Burton, the performances headlined Harry Kipper and Kevin Houtari.

Harry Kipper's reputation for the bizarre is reinforced in his untitled work. Kipper enters in blackface, sporting only a natty McDonald's cap, he douses himself in eggs, and French-American spaghetti while delivering a tongue-in-cheek speech on Rawhide. He introduces us to a collection of dolls, including Frieda, who "has funny eyes, she's not quite right"; Uncle Albert, who has lost his body, and a masochistic doll which Kipper whips and strangles. Then, donning a McDonald's cap, he douses himself in eggs, flour, and Franco-American spaghetti while delivering a tongue-in-cheek speech on British royalty, singling out "Queen Philip." Even Brooke Shields gets lampooned in this delicious send-up of America's love affair with food and gossip. Kipper ends his performance with an exclamation point by maternally displaying his genitals.

Burton's work, "The Affair," chronicles the romantic relationship of Pierre, a happy-go-lucky cat, and Clare, an innocent, coquettish rabbit, as they picnic in a field. While they sip wine, nuzzle, and do the things young lovers do, Clare becomes infatuated with Pierre. However, when Clare skips off to chase butterflies with a bottomless net, Pierre goes out catting with a sassy little rabbit named Fanny. The vignettes end with Clare standing in shadow, heartbroken.

Burton's animal characters are created with huge spherical masks, giving a wonderful storybook atmosphere to the piece. A violin sets the musical mood of each section of "The Affair" from a gay tempo of childlike infatuation to the bittersweet sound. The artist's shattered naiveté, lighting and costume are kept simple, adding to the enchantment of the piece.

I'm not sure whether "The Affair" falls under the heading of performance art with its complete character and plot development, or begins to emerge as a one-act play, rather than a performance piece. Even the staging smacks of theatre, giving "The Affair" another push over the ultraline line separating performance art from the performing arts.

The one low point of this two-day presentation of performance art was Kevin Houtari's video history piece, "Tales of the Baltic," which unfortunately opened the series. Due largely to a poor audio system that garbled two important narrative segments, "Baltic" became an indigestible tossed salad of unconnected images pertaining to the political history of Finland and "devils in Lithuania." How these two topics relate is never quite clear.

Each of the three successful presentations in this show works for different reasons. Finley's outrageous combinations of texture and emotion are pure Finley, an absolute expression of the artist, frenzied, but intimate and honest. Kipper's work stands almost entirely on his knack for kinky humor. Burton's use of a fantasy setting to tell the all-too-familiar tale of love found and lost keeps the piece fresh, avoiding sentimentality and heavy-handedness.

As a whole, Patrick Burton's presentation of performance art was a lot of fun. I hope the poor turnout, probably caused by the summer's extreme heat, will not discourage him from producing future shows.

Bill Hogg is an actor, poet, and playwright best known for his play Sha ' Nuft which enjoyed an eight-week run at the Attic Theatre in 1981.

Lynne Avadenka
Willis Gallery
Detroit

Awarded an Individual Artist Grant from the Michigan Council for the Arts to study the technique of Japanese woodblock printing, Lynne Avadenka's recent books, drawings, and prints demonstrate that this print maker-calligrapher has learned more things Japanese than technique alone.

Communion with nature — and especially appreciation of its beauty — is a theme close to the Japanese heart. In a beautiful little folded book called "Luna," Avadenka makes literal, and at the same time abstract, the favorite Japanese pastime of moon viewing. "Luna" is constructed of a single long sheet folded into double pages like a Japanese album. On them the artist has painted crescent shapes in blues mixed with silvery ink. Some crescents are cut out and reapplied so that as one turns the pages one views the moon through the cutouts. The book can be read forward, backward, and from either side, and reveals as many changing shapes and colors as a kaleidoscope. "Luna" is one of those private treasures one picks up to peruse from time to time with constantly renewed interest and pleasure.

Avadenka enlarges her Luna theme with two folio-sized, multipaneled, folded screens entitled "Insomnia" and "Cynthia." These pieces are similar in construction to "Luna," but more ambitious and much darker in color. A second group of these small screens seems more closely modeled upon those Japanese paper screens whose landscape scenes continue from panel to panel. But Avadenka's landscapes are actually skylines, or skywriting, extending across as many as twelve small panels framed in white. The artist's light palette and the screen's translucence reinforce the Japanese feeling, but their fragility gives them a refreshing, improvised quality.

On one dark-framed screen called "Blue Bends," the skywriting is replaced by more...
richly colored lunar shapes. The random strokes of the earlier screens are very sparse here and extend across the frames between panels. These strokes are intended to draw the planetary landscape panels out of their frames so that in the mind’s eye, they appear as one.

The show also includes a series of crayon drawings. In these drawings, Avadenka compresses her paper screens into a single image of impossible folds, which looks somewhat like a softly folded napkin. Tucked among the folds are the same lunar shapes that appeared in "Blue Bends." Entitled “Planetary Mansions” (i.e., homes of the planets), the series consists of six drawings, each of one or more planets folded into an imaginary landscape. As folded shapes that can be mentally unfolded, the later drawings in the series are the more successful. But it is the artist’s intent that the folds not be unraveled into a readable whole. Here is another reference to the Japanese aesthetic tradition: the idea that the appeal of an image lies in its inconsistency and contradiction.

Aside from trying to unfold impossible folds or to interpret what they are, one can appreciate their coloration, which is very complex, very painterly. Beginning with a single tone and without a particular palette in mind, Avadenka has layered color upon color in a modification technique not unlike the tonal gradations or “colors” of the mezzotint. Avadenka herself describes “Haven I” and “Haven II” as drawings made with mezzotint tools. And not surprisingly, the image is a continuation of the Planetary Mansion theme with the addition of extra triangular shapes to the impossible folds. The artist describes these triangles as tents in the wilderness, an extension of her love of camping, of being enfolded by nature.

With the addition of the tents, the source of these Haven images becomes clear. They are simultaneously a compression of a very deep landscape and also a unique and very perceptive interpretation of the traditional oriental landscape, that vertical format which leads the viewer from a stream in the foreground to the mountains in the far distance.

Avadenka is still working on the Haven series. What develops after this exhibition will be interesting to follow in the light of her abstractions from the Japanese aesthetic.

Elizabeth DuMouchelle is completing her Master’s Degree in Art History at Wayne State. She is past president of the Founders Junior Council of the Detroit Institute of Arts.

### Robert Bailey, Patricia Dorsey, and Harry Zmijewski

**Detroit Focus Gallery**

Detroit Focus Gallery in July, highlights the work of Detroit area artists Robert Bailey, Patricia Dorsey, and Harry Zmijewski. The style of each artist is different, but the show as a whole illustrates one point: the "homegrown" exhibitions, that is, the ones mounted by area artists of work done by other Michigan artists, tend to be more interesting than the muddled amalgamations put together by the hired guns who come in to pass judgment on the provincials. The shows are better for several reasons: first, outsiders are not used to, or aware of, work done in Detroit and therefore do not know what to look for; second, many artists who have a body of work are not submitting to the dog-and-pony shows because their work will be lost in the work of others; and finally, the Review Committee exhibits allow the artist the room and the control over what is installed where so that their work may be seen to its best advantage.

Robert Bailey is fascinated by the idea of a record as an aural latent image. (Record discs appear to be identical: black, round, flat, only when played do they reveal the wealth of information encoded on their surfaces.) This has lead Bailey to examine the record socially, as a symbol of popular culture; artistically, as an icon to be manipulated serially; and representationally, as a source for illustrations of his impressions of sound. Generally, the first two modes of inquiry are more successful than the third. In "Kenton in Blue," Bailey portrays the big band sound with various planes of blue merging, overlapping, and flying apart under centrifugal force; a first-order image that is not quite as satisfying as the actual handling of the materials. In other works, borrowings from cover designs and packaging techniques combine with rendering in such a way that by using the disc as his referent, Bailey is able to present a theme and variations that ultimately comment on the artmaking process itself. Bailey’s theme and variations is similar to the target series of Jasper Johns, though the orientation in Bailey’s work is toward New Wave, rather than Expressionism.

Patricia Dorsey’s enamels on wood are visual representations of personal ruminations. The paintings employ the mythic/diaristic device commonly found in works of feminist art. Dorsey does not appear to suffer the mental anguish of Brenda Goodman or Eva Hesse, her work is more suburban and from the mainstream. The unchanging format of spatial distortion, off-the-shelf house enamel, and limited palette, places responsibility for the *raison d’etre* of the work on the iconography. Dorsey needs to explore this avenue in greater depth to identify what constitutes significant and communicable subject matter for portrayal. (An artist who is particularly successful in this vein is Hollis Sigler.)

In her review of this show in the *Detroit News*, Joy Colby states that the third artist, Harry Zmijewski, creates "assemblages" (a favored methodology of the Cass Corridor group). This statement is misleading in that assemblage is, according to Webster, "an artistic composition made from scraps, junk, and odds and ends (as paper, cloth, stone or metal)" that is, cast off objects that are retrieved from the world and recycled into art.
objects, the empirico-transcendent modulation of the material as junk and art being paramount to the vision at work. Zmijewski's sculptures, however, are made from things that possess utilitarian value. He employs the materiel of industry to construct art objects similar to the objects found in industry. Both art and industry begin at the same point, taking raw materials and transforming them through technology (working methods) into objects of value. Zmijewski's work does not bring the garbage of Detroit into the gallery, but is rather a dignified portrayal of the proletarian.

The most salient aspect of the exhibition is the message it gives the art community of Detroit and Focus in particular: if credence is to be given to the idea of a regional center, it must come from within the community first and need not be validated by imported art-stars. In the early phases of his career, Clyfford Still refused to exhibit in Europe because he did not deem certification from that power center to be valid in regard to his work. May the same hold true for Detroit in times to come.

Vincent A Carducci is a local artist/writer/designer

Laurie Margot Ross
Furs by Robert
Detroit

If the general premise of the recent Contemporary Art Institute of Detroit (C A I D.) multi media events seemed dated, mask-mime Laurie Margot Ross' performance did not.

The events, organized by Patricia Dorsey were held at Furs by Robert Salon on Madison at Grand Circus Park. The project focused around the "orchestrated destruction" of five recently rejected Dorsey art works in the hope that the exercise would generate new art. The five separate performances were grouped under the title Identification with the Aggressor, or How to Handle Rejection in Art. One event, called Concerto for Haircut and Oboe, featured a musician/hairdresser. Aftermath of the haircut was left on the floor; some hair was glued like a beard to one drawing. At another event, a work was destroyed by a volley of garbage. I saw these remains while attending Ross performance. An intimate theater experience that must have been the highlight of the series.

Ross calls her fusion of mime and mask-drama abstract experimental theater. She studied at the Leonard Pitt School of Mime and at New York University's experimental theater program and has national and international appearances to her credit.

An Indonesian influence has received while studying in West Java, figures most prominently in her work. Deliberate motions and posings evoke the slow-motion flavor of traditional Indonesian dance.

To see Ross noiselessly lay down and retrieve objects heightens our appreciation of sound. The performance can be compared to a Japanese tea ceremony where the scraping of utensils or the sound of pouring water become integral parts of the whole ritual experience. Although Ross often uses music (Steve Reich is a favorite), "Narcissism," her performance at Furs by Robert, is done in silence, which dramatizes its introspective theme.

Mask-mime offers a unique challenge to the artist. It limits the face, our most expressive instrument, to a static pose. Ross' choice of a neutral mask leaves all expression to her mastery of body language. A unisex costume of dark pants, overblouse and gloves produces the symbolic Everyman.

An abstract drawing of two heads and torso represents organizer Dorsey's first impressions of a Ross performance suggesting Narcissus who loved to admire his own image. Ross' character frames the drawing with ornate chalk curlicues making it into a gilded mirror. She then inscribes an urn-like shape in the center of the picture to underscore a satisfied self-containment.

Self-satisfaction is but a disguise, and to rip away that disguise is painful. An adept mask change produces a face badly marred with two grotesque crevices. One look in a small hand mirror is enough. After trying to elude the image unsuccessfully, the mirror is discarded, given away to an audience member.

The work is unresolved. Although the Dorsey drawing serves as a good springboard, Ross is at her best when left to her own devices. A cyclical return to the drawing to add a few final cryptic symbols seems forced. "Narcissism" should be developed and expanded. Its theme is universal. Who has not been afraid to acknowledge the chinks in his own emotional armor?

Marianne Dinkins Rudnicki is a free lance arts writer. She has been regional correspondent for Dance magazine and has edited Detroit Dance News.
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Complete entry form and jury card. Print or type name clearly as it should appear in the catalog. Slides will not be returned unless an SASE is enclosed with entry materials. Slides should be mailed in a protective case.

DELIVERY
Artists will be notified of the juror's decision. The juror reserves the right to a final screening of accepted entries. Accepted entries should be shipped or hand delivered to the Art Gallery no later than January 30, 1984. All shipping costs are the responsibility of the artist.

LIABILITY
Every precaution will be taken to assure protection of the entries. The Art Department is responsible for works during exhibition and while the exhibit is traveling to other exhibit locations in Michigan. However, it will not be responsible for works arriving in damaged condition.

CALENDAR
November 17, 1983: Slides, entry form, and fee due
December 28, 1983: Notification to entrants of juror's decision from slides
January 30, 1984: Accepted entries due at Central Michigan University Art Gallery
February 13, 1984: Juror's final review of actual works and award selection
February 21, 1984: 8 p.m. Opening reception at Central Michigan University Art Gallery
March 9, 1984: Exhibition closes
The Small Sculpture Exhibit will then travel throughout Michigan in 1984. All mailed entries will be returned after January 30, 1985. Hand delivered entries can be picked up at Central Michigan University Art Gallery after January 30, 1985. Catalog will list exhibition dates and locations in Michigan for the traveling exhibit.

CONDITIONS
Entries must be ready for exhibition no assembly. Entry must be completed within the last year. Entries must have label attached to the work. Entries must have suitable packing material. Shipping container whether hand delivered or mailed.
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In Focus

Nancy Spero and Leon Golub will be in town in early October to jury a painting and drawing exhibition for the Gallery. Spero’s work is described as “rooted in decades of political activism as well as in an aesthetic far fresher and more disturbing than that of her reactionary peers.” Golub’s painting is grounded in Greek and Roman figurative art, and since the late 1960’s, he has increasingly constructed on this base images that speak philosophically to the problem of power in contemporary societies. Spero and Golub’s visit to Detroit is sponsored by the Center for Creative Studies and Detroit Focus. The entry deadline for “Painting and Drawing,” the show that Spero and Golub will jury, is Oct. 1, 1983.

Exhibition Schedule at the Gallery

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The schedule is subject to change.

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