



Gallery to close after 40 memorable years

December 26, 2010

As the New Year approaches, Karen and Arnold Klein are preparing to celebrate the closing of their gallery. A bittersweet celebration to be sure. Known for its collection of fine art and rare books, as well as custom framing, the Arnold Klein Gallery in Royal Oak will mark 40 years to the day on Feb. 14, 2011 with a special Valentine's Day show, and then will close its doors. The economy and the desire to spend time on personal projects prompted the Pleasant Ridge couple's decision to say goodbye to the gallery that has served the community and provided for their family over the years.

I stopped by recently to see the final group exhibition -- paintings, drawings and three-dimensional pieces by artists who have repeatedly shown work at the gallery. Arnold Klein told me a little something about each artist, their background or the technique they used, as we walked past each piece on display. When I asked if he had a favorite show in those 40 years, Arnold was quick to answer.

"Karen's have been the most beautiful shows, truly," he said.

Karen Klein's contribution to this final group show is a beautiful colored pencil and watercolor piece of the night sky filled with many hundreds of stars and with several brilliantly colored moths flying in view. Doing custom framing in the back of the gallery by day, Karen worked on her art at night, but that will change when the gallery closes.

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

One of Karen's new projects is to transform the dining room in their home into a Room of Curiosities. Karen is taking hand-built cabinets and covering the outsides, the insides of the doors and the backs of the shelves with her natural history-themed drawings.

"One of the cabinets is devoted to the relationship of the sky to the earth," she said. "It's a combinations of things. The background for a drawing of a scorpion is my version of a Hubble telescope photo and the constellation Scorpio. There's a drawing of the planet Mars paired with an

Elephant beetle called Megasoma mars ... Over the cabinet I'm drawing astronomer body parts. I have Tycho Brahe's nose, Galileo's finger, and Caroline Herschel's eye looking up at comets."

Karen has finished more than 100 drawings of different varieties of apples to fill a herbarium cabinet that is covered with drawings of fruit, and she has completed most of the drawings for a bird cabinet. You can read about the Cabinet of Curiosities project's at www.roomforcuriosity.blogspot.com.

An expert in fine prints and books, Arnold is also an artist. He has a colored pencil drawing in the final group show and looks forward to having time after the gallery closes to work on his art. Arnold said opening a gallery can be very risky because your tastes in art may not be the same as others in the community.

"It's one of few businesses where you have to start out rich," he said, laughing, (because they were not). "Karen's father recommended that I own an art gallery because I had worked at the DIA's department of graphic arts for about five years. I was the first curatorial assistant they hired. I knew the print world, the market, the art and the values."

MOVING NORTH

Initially a joint effort with friends, the gallery opened on E. Jefferson in Detroit as the Klein Vogel Gallery. Three years later when the gasoline shortage hit the gallery moved to Woodward Ave., two blocks south of 14 Mile, which was much closer

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to collectors, the gallery's loyal clientele. In the last couple of months, many long-time clients have been coming in with art to be framed before the gallery closes

"I did not anticipate the response we've had to ending 40 years. We've had so many people come in and we've had so much business, it seems stupid to be stopping," Karen said. "...I do have someone I will suggest to my clients (for framing) that I trust ... I'm feeling very good about this, and I don't want to frame any more, so it's all working out."

Forty years ago very few people understood the concept of acid-free boards and framing.

"Arnold worked in the museum's print department, and it was on a museum level that people began to realize that the boards being used for framing were literally burning and ruining paper. So we've have always tried to do the right thing," Karen said. "I've had the opportunity to see from our collection and from client's collections how the framing has weathered, and I think we've done a very good service."

LOCAL ARTISTS

Artwork that wasn't selling in the gallery typically moved to the Klein's personal collection at home — and sometimes back again.

"Every once in a while there has been something in the gallery that we love so dearly and other people ignore it," Karen said. "One print in particular we took home because no one took it seriously because it was \$25. It was a beautiful print by an artist that I'm very fond of, so one day we just removed it from circulation."

The Kleins feel honored to have hung work by talented local artists. Karen said it's disappointing when people walk in and only want to see "a Chagall, a Miro, a Calder."

"These are the names they know and they won't see anything else ... It makes me sad," she said. "We have artists in our area that are superior to what I see when we go to New York ... We have had artists related to the gallery that are truly original."

Congratulations to the Kleins on their gallery's remarkable 40 years in business, and best wishes for the future.

Arnold Klein Gallery is closed for the holidays through Jan. 3. The final group show will be up through mid January, and other items including rare books, catalogues, magazines and posters will be available through mid-February. Gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday. Call (248) 647-7709 or visit www.arnoldkleingallery.com. The gallery is located at 32782 Woodward Ave.

Karen Klein's drawings can also be found on stationary and clothing items at www.toadsonties.com.

Happy New Year!

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Pleasant Ridge residents Karen and Arnold Klein will celebrate the closing of their gallery, the Arnold Klein Gallery in Royal Oak, on Feb. 14, 2011, 40 years to the day the gallery opened.(Photos by Diana Wing)



A colored pencil and watercolor piece by Karen Klein is in the final group show through mid-January at Arnold Klein Gallery in Royal Oak.

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