

The Birmingham Eccentric

Refugee Artist Paints Again

Keeps Talent a Secret When Hired at Cranbrook

By BETTY DUPUIS

"It is not so difficult to start over again when you are young," explained the artist with his air of quiet dignity. "But, when you are older—especially in a strange country where you are learning the language and nobody knows you—it is another matter."

There are few who know more about beginning anew than the speaker, Mikelis A. (Mike) Zvirbulis, 65, whose one-man show of more than 40 paintings is currently on view in the art department of Kingswood school, Cranbrook.

Three times, in his native Latvia, he lost everything—house, paintings, possessions—and was lucky to keep his family alive and safe. This happened to Zvirbulis in both World Wars and again when the Communists occupied his country. His talent evident at an early age, he began painting when he was 12. He studied art both in his country and in Czarist Russia. But Latvia is the wrong place to live during wartime, he pointed out. It is used as a highway by European armies.

So, following the first World War, Zvirbulis made a few start. Between the two great wars, times were good. He traveled and studied extensively in Italy, France and Germany. In finding himself a suitable studio in Riga, his home, he inadvertently became the proprietor of a photographic studio.

TRYING to rent part of the building as a studio for his painting, he was instead, offered the business by the aging photographer. Zvirbulis knew nothing about photography but, when the owner agreed to his financial proposition—a monthly payment for the rest of the photographer's life—he was in business.

Zvirbulis soon found himself growing both wealthy and famous. Then came World War II, closely followed by the Russian occupation. He describes it thus: "It is terrifying to hear a knock on the door in the middle of the night. . . to be told you have two hours to get out."

"You take foolish things for which you have no use and leave behind the important things—I had quite a lot of money in the house but I didn't bring it with me."

THE ZVIRBULIS fled to Bavaria, where it was a struggle to exist. German marks were next to worthless, even when they could get hold of some, so they traded Mrs. Zvirbulis' jewelry for food.

Then came the American occupation, and, with it, more stable economy. During this time, three people befriended the refugee artist and made it possible for him to resume painting.

Two were Germans. One, the widow of an art professor, gave him an easel, brushes and a palette. 300 years old, from among her husband's effects. Another lady herself a painter, provided him with a room for a studio.

Third benefactor was his first customer—an American Army lieutenant, who bought six paintings of the photographer's life—he was in business.

HUT FEAR still walked with the homeless in Europe so a cousin in New Jersey aided the Zvirbulis family's entry into the United States.

Here, he was shocked to learn in some places, artists are consid-



OPENING his one man show in Kingswood school, Mr. Zvirbulis received congratulations from Arthur B. Wittliff, secretary of Cranbrook foundation, and Mrs. Wittliff.



ARTIST Mikelis (Mike) Zvirbulis uses a 300 year old palette, gift of a German friend, when he paints in his home-studio on the Cranbrook grounds.

Madrigal Singers Will Entertain Musical Members

Birmingham Madrigal Singers will depart from their usual style and sing a group of spring choral numbers May 11. This program will be presented to members of Birmingham Musicals at a Devon Gables luncheon celebrating the Musicals' 30th anniversary.

Luncheon committee members are chairman, Mrs. W. H. Hohmeyer of Beverly Hills; decorations, Mrs. Matthew Cammareri; Adams avenue; reservations, Mrs. James J. Hogan of Westwood drive; and Mrs. Earl Bartholomew, Yarnouth road, Bloomfield Village.

MRS. Harold L. Walker, Kinross road, will direct the singers, with Mrs. John R. Phelps, Walnut Lake road, West Bloomfield, providing accompaniment.

Singing with the Madrigals will be Mrs. Howard Berg, Mrs. David Huell, Mrs. Clark Pardee, Jr., Mrs. Harold Walker, Mrs. Bartholomew, Mrs. Robert Killean, Mrs. Richard Post, Mrs. A. Roy Swartz, Mrs. Walls Dolan, Mrs. Maurice Garabrant, Mrs. Elliott Kinney and Mrs. John R. Phelps.



ON THE JOB at Cranbrook art galleries, the artist has many duties.

Fashionette Takes Mother to Parties

Mrs. Arthur Swenson and daughter, Barbara, were guests of the Wapiti at their annual mother-daughter banquet recently at the Royal Oak Elks temple.

Barbara was one of the speakers, presenting a talk on fashions and care of clothes.

She and her mother will attend another mother-daughter event when the Fashionettes, of which Barbara is one, with their mothers, will be guests of J. L. Hudson's at a breakfast May 12.

Meanwhile the Fashionettes present their weekly fashion shows every Saturday afternoon in Hudson's teen department. Another Birmingham member of the panel is Barbara Bond.

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