

Accent

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—News Photo by Edwin C. Lombardo

Artist finds her subject is popular

"BRING IN THE CLOWNS" on canvases of all sizes and colors painted by Southfield artist Agnes Mezigian. A huge mural in the background depicts the clowns, acrobats and animals of the Shrine Circus she painted when they visited Detroit.

Clown art has a message

By MARY ELLEN KIRBY
News Staff Writer

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Agnes Mezigian's home in Southfield is circus — full of clowns.

Although Mrs. Mezigian is a serious painter of abstracts, landscapes, florals and portraits, she paints twice as many clowns as anything else.

There are happy clowns, sad clowns, mischievous clowns, clowns in bright colors, clowns in pastels, some in acrylics, others in oils. They are in block prints of all colors and some even painted with circus sawdust.

Now Mrs. Mezigian is painting clowns on the tops of golf caps — working hard to keep up with the demands of friends and relatives.

Remarkably, no two of her clown faces are alike. Whenever she sells a clown painting, she hurries to paint more.

"I HATE to lose my clowns," she admitted. "I never enter them in shows because judges seldom take them seriously. I always select abstracts or something else — never my clowns. They are for me."

"In that sense, I suppose I am a clown — presenting to the art world something it appreciates, but not what I truly love. Still, aren't we all clowns? We all pretend in some way or another. We are seldom able to be just ourselves," the Southfield artist commented.

Although her clowns are not publicized through shows, they quietly sell themselves to all who see them.

One large sawdust painting of a clown backed by circus tents hangs in the lobby of Southfield's Sports Arena — a gift from Mrs. Mezigian to local children.

MRS. MEZIGIAN has been painting since age 9, when she pleaded with her mother for a \$25 set of oils instead of a party dress. She soon sold her first painting for the amount of her mother's investment.

She won art awards through grade school, but devoted her high school years to singing.

She continued painting in night classes at Cass Tech and Marygrove College, and later with the Birmingham-Bloomfield Art Association. She still belongs to cri-

tique groups organized by well-known artists in the metropolitan Detroit area.

"I once took a clown painting to a critique to get some pointers on improving it," she said. "I wasn't asking for a critique on the subject matter, but all the artists said 'Don't paint clowns. That's passe. Do artistic work instead.' The more they tell me not to paint clowns, the more I paint them."

"WHAT'S WRONG with being a clown painter? Clowns are really not that easy to paint. I feel that if someone can paint a good clown, he can paint anything. Besides my clowns are only for other clown lovers and not for blue ribbons."

Mrs. Mezigian began painting clowns in 1957 when her father, the late Avedis Kazanjian, was ill with leukemia.

"He loved them," she said. "Even though he was so sick he got a kick out of seeing Red Skelton or Jerry Lewis doing their clown acts on television."

"He was a handsome man with a deep cleft in his chin. So I began painting every clown with a dimple in his chin and I still do."

Several years ago, Mrs. Mezigian was invited to the Shrine Circus where she painted many of the famous Shriner clowns. She has parted with only one of those paintings — she gave it to a young girl who later died of leukemia.

"SHE SAW me painting 'Oopsie' during a television show to publicize the circus. I have a letter of appreciation from her mother and I'll always treasure it."

Mrs. Mezigian juggles her painting hours with housework and looking after two teen-agers. Two other children are married.

She began painting clown faces on golf caps last year when her husband, George, was in charge of a golf outing.