



Kauffman, Andrene

Page 4 Press Publications Friday, March 7, 1986

Quiet Resident Makes Noise In Art World

by Jean Van Rensselaar

Andrene Kauffman's life could be compared to that of a silkworm.

She lives a quiet existence, confined to her Elmhurst home. In the stillness, she spins a magnificent thread of creativity, producing visible proof of her gift to outsiders.

Wednesday, March 12, she will be exhibiting some of her recent works (paintings, sculptures, and murals) at Truman College in Chicago. The show is designed to honor the eight living Chicago-area artists who participated in the Works Progress Administration (WPA) program.

Kauffman, 80, along with about 100 other people, were engaged in the effort from 1933 to 1943.

The primary goal of the WPA was to furnish work for unemployed artists and increase public interest in the arts.

During the Depression, those in the art field were particularly hard hit. With the collapse of the economy, the market for art disappeared.

When Kauffman was first approached by WPA, she was an emerging artist in her late 20s. "I had two part-time jobs," she said, "but they looked like they

were closing down. They were recruiting artists to do designing and basic painting."

"I don't believe in setting specific goals, but I knew that I wanted to devote my life to art. The project gave me a chance to have other people see my work."

During her years with the administration, the artist graduated from The Art Institute in Chicago and later went on to receive a master of fine arts degree from there.

Working in an atmosphere of regimented creativity for \$24.50 a week, she produced 50 to 75 easel paintings, 20 murals and more than a dozen bas-relief sculptures for public buildings in the Midwest.

"Brookfield Zoo was just being completed at the time," she explained. "The directional signs were made of carved wood by some of the people and the backgrounds of the cages were painted by supervisors of the mural projects."

"I think it was a very lively and stimulating time in art," Kauffman said. "It was just a small bit, but it was important."

"We chose our own subject matter but you had to do respectable subjects. We were not told what to paint

or how to paint. We were supposed to be professionals. Everyone tried to do the very finest work, under the circumstances."

Officials from public buildings, such as post offices and schools, were allowed to inspect the artworks and choose which they wanted for their facilities.

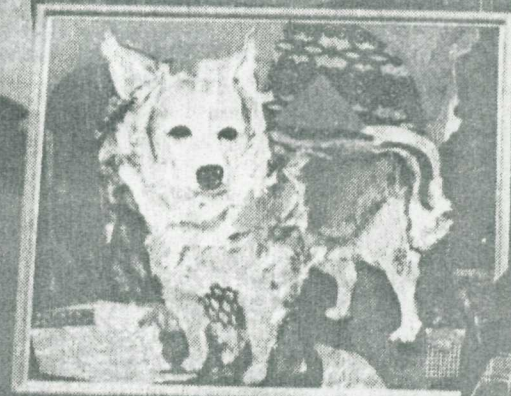
Today Kauffman's work can be seen in the playground houses in Oak Park, which house relief sculptures depicting children's fairytales. Burbank School on the west side of Chicago still has several murals on display.

But Kauffman's murals at the Children's Hospital and Hirsch High School, both in Chicago, were destroyed.

The hospital murals were destroyed when the building was demolished and Hirsch administrators chose to obliterate their murals with housepaint.

"A lot of people didn't know what they had," she said, "not only very fine art, but also history. The cultural history is the real history of our country. It hurts very much ... very much."

The artist's biggest scare came when she was told that the Oak Park sculptures were stolen when the playhouses were relocated. They



Andrene Kauffman rests beside her painting "Hairy," which is part of her art exhibition called "FEDS," at Truman College, 1145 W. Wilson Ave., Chicago. Kauffman lives a quiet existence in her Elmhurst home, but her more than 50 years of contributions to the Chicago art community give her frequent recognition.

were actually being held in storage temporarily.

"I was really upset," she said, explaining the ensuing investigation. "It's a great joy when they're rediscovered."

Kauffman taught for 40

years at the Art Institute. She retired in 1967 as a professor emeritus.

The artist and her dalmatian, Emma, are content with their lives. Kauffman's peace comes from a life well

spent that continues to spend.

The Truman College exhibit, at 1145 W. Western in Chicago, will run from March 12 through April 4. Several special events are scheduled.