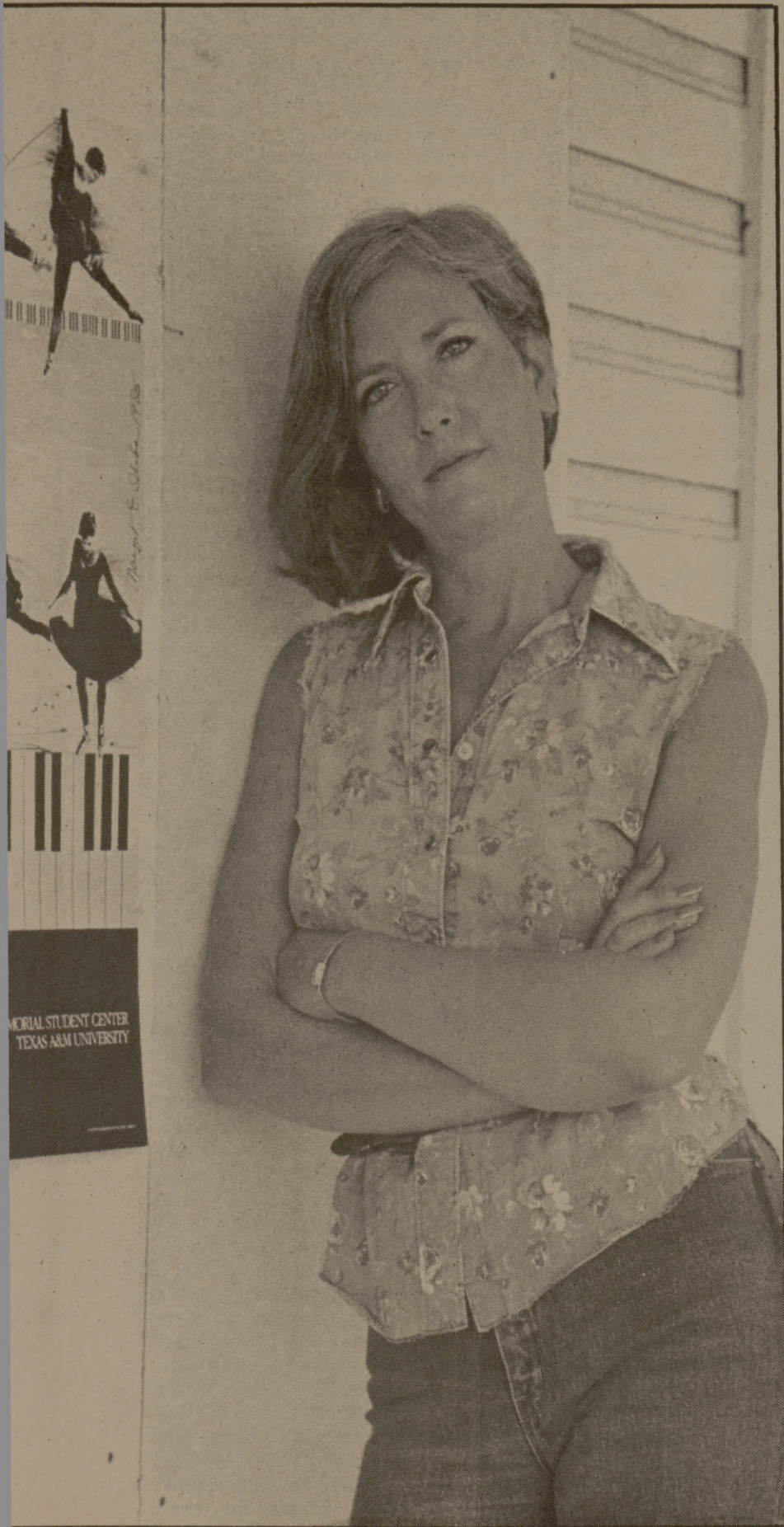


Meet Ilika: Portrait of the artist

By WENDY JOHNSON



the history of painting than some of the contemporary mimimalists around today." She doesn't like the contemporary mimimalistic stuff, even though it is big now. "It's ugly and depressing," she says.

Art reflects society, she explains. An artist is simply a vehicle for this reflection.

She calls her work "pretty architectural."

"My work is figurative, basically," she says. "The basic attitude is change. Figures in motion and situations in change. A lot of movement.

"Oh, I just love smoking!" she blurts, as she lights about her fifth cigarette. Josh's birthday is coming up and she promised him she'd quit smoking. Joshua is eight. She has raised him alone since he was six months old. He was born in Mexico, so he will enjoy dual citizenship until he's 18.

"He wants to be an actor, so he can have a tutor and be on TV," she says.

"I guess he knows I'm different from most moms," she says. "He'll say 'Say something to them, Mom, they're looking at you.' More people are recognizing her by sight now, since she has begun doing TV interviews. "But this is how I support my son; and he's expensive!" she says.

Ilika's works are sold in Bryan through Thomas Johnson and Associates. She markets her own work, though she has had to learn the business end the hard way; through trial and error and learning slowly from others. She says you don't graduate with any business knowledge when you get an art degree; they don't really expect you to make your living by being an artist. She works on commission if asked, but mostly uses her own ideas.

"I make quite a bit of money here," she says. "But Dallas is fantastic. Houston has an oil leak, and San Antonio is still bilingual."

Ilika says the performing arts get

more support in Bryan-College Station than the visual arts. People will pay to go to the symphony or ballet but won't spend money buying paintings. KAMU has an art auction every year and art exhibits are held around town, but the financial support is behind performing, not the visual arts.

Ilika says there are a lot of artists in this community.

"But just two or three of us are internationally known," she says. "Few are even statewide."

Ilika likes living out in the country because she needs large spaces of time with no interferences in order to paint.

"It's a process; you have to realize the stages you go through to create," Ilika says. "My duty is to pay attention," — she calls it the sponge effect — "You walk around, and wait, and it happens."

Ilika says art is a language, just like Spanish or French.

"You make a visual language," she says. "Some understand, some don't — if you're lucky a lot of people understand."

"Exhibits are a way of learning the language of art. The arts will teach you about people. Get involved."

She suggests getting involved in some of the MSC committees, such as OPAS, the Visual or Cultural Arts committees or Hospitality.

"The MSC leads students to the things that are going on in the community that have to do with arts and culture," she says.

"Check Rudder (Exhibit Hall), look at bulletin boards, check things that are happening," she urges. "Computer graphics is very good at A&M; and growing; growing strong."

Joe Arredondo, coordinator of University art exhibits, agrees with Ilika that arts are important in developing the whole person. He suggests students just get involved in activities related to the arts; to find out what they do and do not like. □

