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Television plots offer ideas to artist for paintings showing world's image

Transplanted Los Angeles native sees Texas as 'different'

Amidst a small maze of cats, pens, paints, Xerox cartridges, canvases and a television, Joan Maffei paints a visual image of a recent afternoon adventure.

Maffei turns on the television to a popular soap opera, puts her head down and continues working on her latest piece of art, "A Trip to the Dump."

Although television is vital to her creativity, Maffei virtually ignores the viewing screen while she works. "Television is my inspiration," Maffei explains. "I can't work without it."

As a small girl, when radio was the only source of home entertainment, she would sit in front of the speaker and draw pictures visualizing the radio shows she heard.

Today, while working on her paintings, Maffei listens to the television. She chooses programs that she doesn't need to actually watch in order to understand what's going on.

"I don't care if they're soap opera stories, the Iran-Contra investigations or whatever," Maffei says, "as long as there's a plot that I can listen to and see unfold."

Maffei says television helps her add imagery to her paintings.

"I like to tell the story and have a plotline in my pictures," Maffei says.

Maffei is a figurative painter who enjoys working with people and things in her daily life.

"Since I do pictures of people I know," Maffei says, "nobody ever wants me to sell anything."

To keep everyone happy, Maffei finds alternate ways to make money with her paintings.



Joan Maffei at work

Photo by Tracy

"I sold the rights of a painting to St. Martin's Press and they used it on the cover of a book," Maffei says, "but I got to keep the painting."

Maffei, a tall, thin, confident woman, partially credits her parents for her lifetime interest in painting.

"I was one of those kids who could draw horses real well," Maffei says. "Everyone thought it was real neat, so I kept on doing it."

The Los Angeles native says her parents encouraged homemade arts and crafts instead of store-bought toys, so plenty of painting materials were always lying around the house.

Although her parents helped spark her interest in art, they weren't supportive of art as a profession.

"My parents said they wouldn't pay my way through college if I studied art because it was too frivolous for a woman," Maffei says.

Her parents told her that during the 1950s, but Maffei says that even today art is too frivolous for anyone.

While her parents wouldn't support her if she studied art, they would support her if she studied education. Maffei, in keeping with her innocent nature, told them she was studying elementary education. But she wasn't. Maffei says they found out the truth when she graduated.

Maffei studied fine arts at the University of California at Los Angeles, where she received both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree. She has been showing and selling her paintings since she graduated from college.

"My first painting went for about \$500," Maffei says, "and that was during my first show in the '60s."

After studying and working in Los Angeles for several years, Maffei, her husband and children moved to Berkeley, Calif., where she painted whatever she saw that inter-

ested her and that realistically portrayed the times.

"I did a series of portraits," Maffei says, "of a soldier, an astronaut, a Black Panther, a policeman and a hippie — John Lennon."

"While I was living in Berkeley," Maffei says, "Ronald Reagan was governor and he was tear-gassing everybody every day. The Berkeley campus was like a battleground, and then we came here and there were all these kids with military uniforms on."

Maffei and her husband moved to College Station in 1970 when her husband accepted a position as a professor at Texas A&M.

"We had never heard of Texas A&M," Maffei says. "We had never even been to Texas and had no idea what we were doing."

"We were in culture shock for at least a year. The amazing part is we're still here and I really love it."

Maffei says her artwork suffered from the move for nearly a year while she overcame her culture shock.

The shock was enhanced by the vast difference in the art worlds of California and Texas. Maffei was separated from her friends and peers, who served as critics to her work. She also discovered the lack of galleries in which to exhibit and sell her work in College Station.

"It was both positive and negative because I was removed from the style and fashion of art in Los Angeles," Maffei says.

"I think that has made my work stronger," Maffei says, "but I haven't been able to exhibit as much as if I would have stayed out there."

She says College Station is a difficult place for artists to thrive.

"I came here and there was no-

thing," Maffei says. "There wasn't even an art program here at A&M."

"It's hard to stay in the marketplace and live in a place that's this removed from it."

Maffei fortunately has been able to utilize the galleries at A&M. Her next solo show will be in the MSC gallery for three weeks in April 1988.

In Los Angeles, Maffei primarily showed her paintings in only one gallery — Ceeje — which displayed works of new, young artists.

"Unlike most places now, I didn't have to go around looking for a gallery," Maffei says. "They came and found me. I had a one-man show the year I got out of graduate school in a gallery on La Cienega boulevard, which was a very big deal."

Maffei sold her first painting during her first exhibit at Ceeje to a woman who liked it particularly because it matched her sofa.

"I thought I was much beyond matching people's sofas," Maffei says with a laugh.

Maffei's paintings enhance everyday events with visual compression and intensity. At first glance of the canvas one might think they were a collage of images, but a closer look reveals precise meaning and character in the placement of everything on the canvas. If anything were removed, the story would not be fully told.

Each painting goes through several stages before completion. First, Maffei develops a concept for the painting. Next, she takes photos of the real elements wanted in the painting. Then she draws sketches, which she copies and places on the canvas in their predetermined spots to finalize the layout. Finally, the oil goes on the canvas to reflect a particular past event.

Sometimes Maffei further copies the Xerox copies, creating usual formats that display single or multiple images.

Maffei has done all her paintings in oil because that's what she was taught to use and that's what she likes. She likes the look of oil paint on canvas. In viewing the art, definite and surrealistic depths enhance rich colors of the oil paint.

"I'm really not a three-dimensional person," Maffei says. "I have very good depth perception."

Maffei says the Los Angeles helped her develop a flattened, shortened perspective in her work.

"You really can't see as far as you can in Los Angeles as you can here," Maffei says. "In Texas, the are very clear and it's easy to see everything." But she says those conditions helped create her original perspective.

Her paintings entertain and engage the spectator with dramatic views of everyday scenes as "Moonflower," of her past as "Portrait of Carlo," and of universal issues as in "I Told You."

Maffei is now working on a she calls her Texas folk art piece, "A Trip to the Dump."

"I thought every artist who lives in Texas has to do a bluebonnet painting," Maffei says. "It turned out to be our dog, Ceci, in the back of a pickup truck and we're going to the dump with all of these bluebonnets along the side of the road."

Looking on her own paintings, Maffei describes them as having surrealistic, narrative quality that humorously depicts an event, a situation or something that has actually happened.

Research at A&M predicts Soviets will begin testing U.S. defense against cruise missiles

**By Rebecca Jackson
Reporter**

Research conducted at the Center for Strategic Technology at Texas A&M predicts the Soviets will try an "end run" around the U.S. Star Wars defense plan, center director Dr. Richard Thomas said.

The U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative, commonly known as SDI or Star Wars, is developing systems to defend against intercontinental ballistic missiles flying through space, Thomas said. ICBMs have been the main offensive threat for 20 years, he said.

But the Soviets are assuming the United States is developing a space defense. Research predicts the Soviets are equipping themselves with manned bombers and cruise missiles that fly close to the earth.

The cruise missiles are small, unmanned bombers that carry nuclear warheads and can be

launched from the air or from submarines, Thomas said.

This is called an "end run" because the United States has no defense against those bombers and cruise missiles, he said.

Researchers have designed an air defense initiative to sense bombers and cruise missiles. They also have found ways to defend against them.

Space-based sensor systems were designed for the SDI to sense ICBMs, but the research found the systems also can be used for air defense against bombers and cruise missiles if the systems are made more sensitive, Thomas said.

The United States must also have fighter aircraft equipped with "fire-and-forget" missiles to shoot down bombers and cruise missiles. These special missiles can be locked on the target and launched, Thomas said. The aircraft firing the missile can immediately turn away and launch another missile with the pilot knowing the target will be hit.

The study is estimating how many launched cruise missiles the Soviets will have to 2015.

The study also is estimating how the Soviets would attack the United States. The predominant direction of a Soviet attack would be over the North Pole, Thomas said.

The Soviets wouldn't attack the United States from all sources, he said. Their basic military tactic is to concentrate all forces in a narrow area and attack in narrow corridors, he said.

The United States has no way of knowing where the attack corridors would be, he said. The United States should have a flexible defense that should include fighter aircraft equipped with "fire-and-forget" missiles, as indicated in the search.

Two full-time professionals and four graduate students are doing the research contracted by SDI, Thomas said.

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