Artists Archives preserve works for posterity

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Anita Rogoff, a spry 90-year-old, keeps a shelf full of dictionaries containing her illustrations in her tidy Chagrin Falls apartment. A bedroom closet holds nearly a lifetime of sketches and watercolors.

The walls in Suzan Kraus' spacious Newbury home are attractively accented with her mixed-media artwork and Chinese brush paintings.

Kraus has plenty of room to store her numerous canvases, many unframed in boxes, but she wanted them preserved for the future. Rogoff's family selected some artwork they wanted, but she wasn't sure what would happen to the rest after her death.

For both women, the solution — to create a legacy at the Artists Archives of the Western Reserve — made sense.

Rogoff and Kraus are the newest additions to the Artists Archives, a nonprofit facility created to preserve and exhibit bodies of work by regional artists. Representative pieces from their careers, as well as videotaped oral histories, will be housed at the archives in Cleveland and made available to future generations.

"I think the archives is an amazing opportunity for Cleveland artists to stay immortal," said Kraus, 61.

It's an opportunity that is not extended to all visual artists, said Artists Archives executive director Kenneth Goerg. A peer review and recruitment committee — made up of artists, art historians and other scholars — decides who gets in, Goerg said.

Nearly 60 artists are represented. Artists who join must have significant Ohio ties and a 20-year career, although exceptions are made in order to get younger artists into the archives, Goerg said.

Rogoff was on the archives' board of directors for several years, until 2009, and is well-known in the arts community. "There was no question she was qualified," Goerg said.
"My kids won't need all of these," artist Anita Rogoff, 90, said about the hundreds of watercolors, landscapes and pencil portraits she's done during her career. The Artists Archives of the Western Reserve will preserve a portion of her body of work.

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**Preserving works for posterity**

Sometimes, members of the peer review committee visit the artist's studio to look at the work and interview the artist, as they did with Kraus.

Artists must pay for their own storage space, which is a one-time contribution to the archives' endowment. Storage units range from the smallest, at about $1,500, to a 192-cubic-foot unit that costs more than $25,000.

The archives want a sample from the artist's early, middle and late career, in various media. Usually artists and their families decide which pieces should be archived.

Any artist or arts patron can become an archives member and display work in member shows. But artists must be vetted in order to become an archived artist, Goerg said.

The archives usually admit about three artists a year, but Rogoff and Kraus are the first new artists to be added in 18 months, Goerg said. He said he hopes this is a sign that artists are feeling more confident about the economy.

The archives, near University Circle on East 123rd Street, also pull works from the collection and displays pieces in public exhibitions. They're planning a joint show for Kraus and artist Mark Krieger running Friday, Jan. 21, through Friday, Feb. 25.

Rogoff's exhibition is tentatively set for fall 2011. The shows are the archives' version of an induction ceremony.

An active senior, Rogoff still drives, does tai chi once a week and fills sketchbooks with renderings of landscapes, flowers and human forms.

"I'd be a sad cookie if I wasn't able to do artwork," she said.

Look up "abacus," "alligator" or "akimbo" in an old Webster's dictionary, and you'll see her illustrations providing a visual definition of those words.

The Cleveland native studied at the Cleveland Institute of Art, then worked as a fashion illustrator and an illustrator for dictionaries and Bibles. She influenced young artists as an art instructor at Case Western Reserve University from the 1940s until her retirement in the 1980s.

The Artists Archives approached her years ago about joining, but "I was just too stingy to buy in," Rogoff said.

She spent $4,000 for her space to store her art. "I figured that was the best. Otherwise, what will happen to it?" Rogoff said.

Kraus creates her mixed-media works with handmade papers from Mexico, Thailand, Bangladesh and other points around the globe, accentuated with found objects. "It's all about working intuitively," she said.

Her work has been on view in previous Artists Archives member shows. "She's one of our younger archived artists," Goerg said.

Kraus has the smallest archives space. As she earns more money through her art, she plans to upgrade to a bigger unit.

A native Clevelander, Kraus has taught art and worked in floral and landscape design. She studied art in Houston, where she and her husband lived for several years. They moved back to Northeast Ohio in 2008 to be closer to her grandchildren.

As an artist, Kraus feels she is producing her best work now.

"I want it to be preserved," she said.

**To learn more**

The Artists Archives of the Western Reserve is at 1834 East 123rd St., Cleveland, in the same building as the Sculpture Center. For details on membership or shows, go to artistsarchives.org or call 216-721-9020.

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