

# Young Artist's Exhibit Draws Attention

Harold Keller's paintings have appeared regularly in shows for the past 10 years.

By EDGAR A. ALBIN  
Professor of Art  
University of Arkansas

**SUBTLE NUANCES OF COLOR** combine with a delicate linear lyricism to produce a visual feast for viewers of the Harold Keller paintings and collages currently on exhibition at the Seventh Street Galleries.

Harold Keller is one of Arkansas' younger artists who is rapidly gaining national stature. His works have been featured at the Jacques Seligmann Galleries, the Bertha Schaeffer Gallery and the Jewish Museum in New York City. He has been honored with two one-man shows at the Eleanor King Galleries in Fayetteville and his works have been exhibited at the University Arts Center.

In November 1960, the University of Oklahoma Art Museum presented a large retrospective exhibition of Keller's work. In addition his works have appeared regularly in mid-western regional shows for the past 10 years.

The current showing at the Seventh Street Galleries includes work from 1955 through the present with the major portion of the exhibit consisting of large paintings and papier colles (pasted paper) compositions done by Keller during the past year. Several of the delightful ceramic figure pots as well as drawings give the scope of the artist in various media.

When one compares the subtlety of line produced by torn shapes interlocking with early works such as the classically serene "Woman with a Monkey" one feels the sure and steady maturing of this artist, yet there is no loss of inventive sensitivity as he moves from an early mysterious realism to the more recent abstract treatment of the human figure.

**KELLER IS NO ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONIST.** His work has never forsaken the image in favor of the personally expressive jabs, dabs and drips of the current school of action painters.

Keller has remained both poet and philosopher, preferring to synthesize his own introspections in terms of the world about him. Perhaps his chief forte is the projection of mood. Where-as the mood of much of modern painting is either bombastic or mechanically patterned, Keller's moods while varied hold close to the pensive, the serene,

the magic and the delicate. They do not in any sense seem contrived.

One suspects in Keller a great admiration for the inspired line of Sandro Botticelli as seen in his famous silver point illustrations for Dante's "Inferno." One also detects his admiration for the brilliant calligraphy of the Sung dynasty painters. His work also reveals his thorough knowledge of contemporary idioms, yet his paintings do not proclaim their derivations; nor does he strive to be different.

Other factors are involved in the vision of this artist. One in his deeply philosophical and religious nature. Educated as a youth in an orthodox Hebrew tradition, many of his works deal with sacred themes of Judaism. The Torah, the Yarmelke and the Tallit have figured in the symbolism of the small jewel-like gold leaf paintings of the early 1950s. In 1956, Keller executed the foyer decorations for the United Hebrew Temple in Fort Smith. Here in brilliant enamels on gold, the ancient Hebrew prayer "Shema Yisroel Adonoi Elohenu Adonoi Echod" forms the motif in Keller's design.

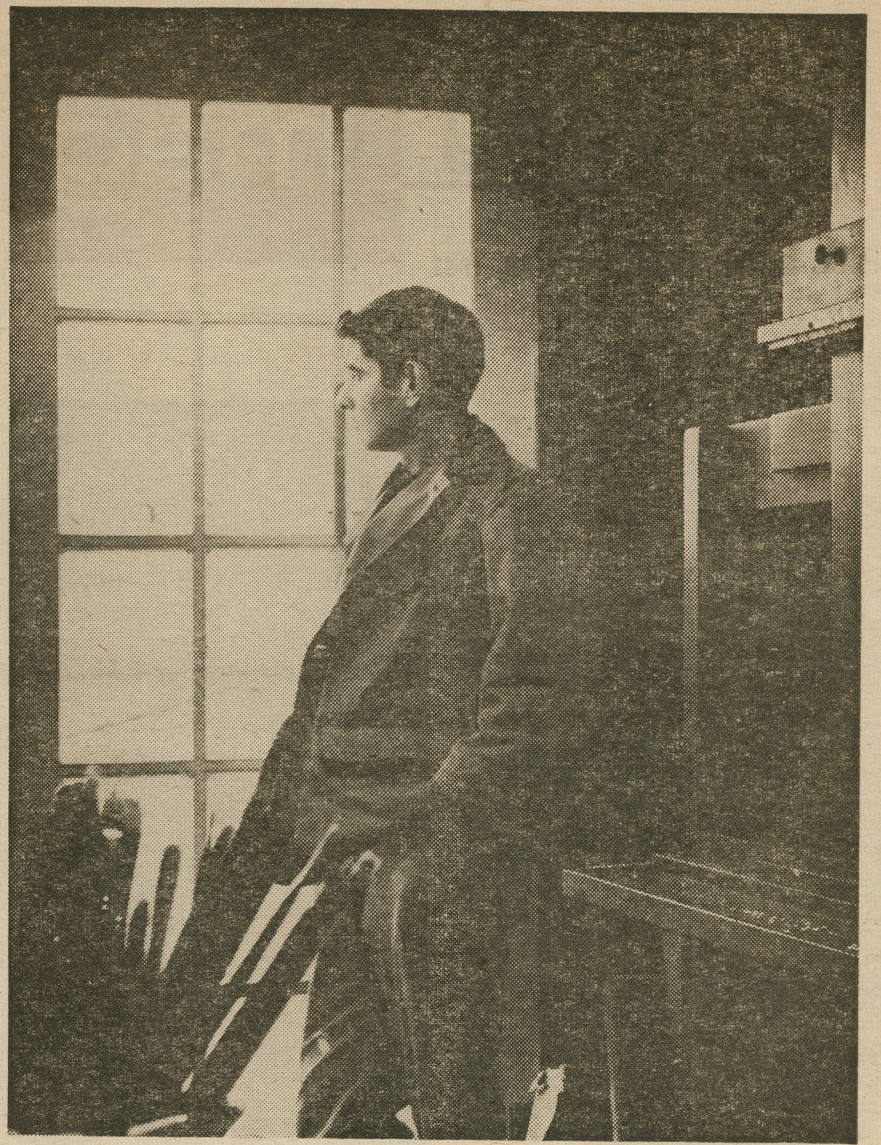
He is equally sympathetic in his treatment of Christian themes such as his Crucifixion, Temptation of St. Anthony and the pensive St. Joan.

Keller's interest in and appreciation of classic themes is also seen in such works as "The Birth of Venus," "Diane," "Venus with a Yellow Bird," or "Leda and the Swan."

**HIS INHERENT CLASSICISM** IS most apparent, however, in his repeated use of the female form in both the paintings and the collages. Here he enters the grand tradition from Phydias through Giorgione and Picasso to the present—the tradition of the serene classic nude in art.

In producing the collages, Keller selects various kinds of papers ranging from fine English wallpaper to Asian rice papers. As the collage develops, dashes of oil color, gold and sometimes delicate lines of ink vividly activate the close harmonies of the whites and off-whites. The torn edges of the paper set up the crisp delineation which echoes the directness of line seen in his earlier works.

Whether it is delicate floral branch etched like crisp gold tracery against an azure sky or a diaphanous and spatial light created from subtly harmonized papers, Keller's personal validity shines through and his rich poetic response to



Harold Keller relaxes in his Fort Smith studio.



"Woman With Monkey" was painted by Harold Keller in 1955.



The oil painting, "Joan" by Keller was painted in 1959. Both pictures are from the collection of Edgar A. Albin.

a man in nature reassures us that there is joy and goodness in the world. This, today, is both unique and refreshing.

Keller received the A.B. degree in art and philosophy from the University of Arkansas in 1949. The following year he was a graduate student in painting at the University of Oklahoma and since then has been doing summer graduate work at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. He taught in the Ozark and the Van Buren High Schools from 1950 until 1956. Then he joined the faculty of the Fort Smith

Junior College, where he now heads the department of art and teaches courses in philosophy.

Mr. and Mrs. Keller live in Fort Smith. They have two children, Vicky, 7, and Clayton, 9. Keller's studio is a quaint, old stable painted red. A large double window offers a vista of Arkansas hills rolling gently toward the distant river. There is a stillness about the open country broken only by bird calls and rustling leaves. This is as it should be for a young man who is a philosopher and a poet in painting.