

Greece's loss has proved to be Mississauga's gain in the art field

By LINDA REED

When Yana Headford was 16 living in Athens she had refused four marriage proposals.

The daughter of upper class parents, Yana led a sheltered life and was unacquainted with all of her prospective suitors.

"Life was so very different from today. I can't believe it happened to me," recalls the Mississauga artist who has lived in Canada for 18 years.

As a young girl, she never went out on the streets unchaperoned. A woman who walked the city alone could be taken for a prostitute. She was always accompanied by the family maid who was not much older than Yana.

One of her proposals — which she recalls with mirth — came from a wealthy, 50-year-old Arab. He had spotted Yana from his chauffeur-driven limousine, and followed her home. Her mother refused politely on behalf of her daughter. Two months later he died.

"I might have been a rich widow but then again I might have given him a new lease on life," she joked.

Much of Yana's early life resembles a paperback romance novel. At the age of 15 she started writing a controversial column for her hometown newspaper. She had a lively style and hit a responsive chord with her readers.

INSPIRED

She was inspired to write and sketch by her grandfather, Papa Dimitrou, who was a famous painter of religious murals. Despite this cultural stimulation and marriage proposals, Yana says her adolescence was lonely.

She was an only child, born when her father was 65 and in his second marriage. Her mother was 45.

The three lived with a servant in a 15-room house and Yana attended private schools. She was a bookish child and had gone through all the French intellectual writers at the age of 12.

Her sheltered life changed dramatically in her seventeenth year when she met an English soldier called Sam Headford at a roller rink. He asked her for a date and Yana said it was impossible unless they were engaged.

The impetuous Sam marched over to Yana's mother and with the aid of an interpreter asked for her daughter's hand in marriage. Her mother said it was a request that could only be answered by the head of the household.

They tried to make Sam wait until morning but he insisted on seeing Yana's father that evening. Her father was in bed reading his newspaper when the proposal was made.

Alarmed at the intrusion, Yana's father asked her what she had to say about the matter. Yana, who knew nothing of the young man, said she thought she'd like to be engaged to him. Six months later they married.

ARMY

As soon as they were wed, Sam was shipped to Syria since the army kept husbands and wives separated during the war for security reasons.

After almost a year of separation, Yana joined the army so she could see her husband occasionally. She served in various capacities for 2½ years. Throughout her service she wore sandals instead of the standard clunky boots.

After the war, Yana and Sam moved to England where Yana tried to take up her writing again. The language barrier made it difficult for her and after receiving a bundle of



It's been a long, interesting road for artist Yana Headford, but the native of Greece seems to have finally found her niche in Mississauga. She is considering establishing her own gallery.

rejection slips she turned to painting.

Initially she took lessons in Bristol, England, but her technique and theory is self-taught. Art was not the foremost thing in her life. The Headfords had three children and Yana was a devoted mother.

The Headfords have lived in Mississauga since they came to Canada in 1957. That year Yana won second prize out of 300 paintings exhibited at a show at Port Credit Public Library. Well-known artist Tom Roberts judged the exhibition and predicted that Yana would be a great Canadian painter in the future. He said her potential was unlimited.

CORRECT

His assessment was correct. After 17 years of disciplined work, Yana's

paintings are so popular that she can't keep up with demands from her galleries. They sell in a price range that varies from \$500 to \$5,000 depending on the buyer. A few of her smaller paintings can be obtained for \$200.

Although Yana paints for herself everyday, she teaches four classes sponsored by the Town of Mississauga and has 50 students. She is not an easy instructor and soon separates the serious from Sunday or social painters.

Yana says she has struggled and suffered to reach the acceptance she enjoys today. At one time, when she was depressed and frustrated because her paintings weren't selling, she went into real estate for two years.

"Sometimes a doctor will advise a businessman to paint for relaxation but mine recommended I take up business to get away from painting," she said.

But she was a compulsive painter and couldn't give it up. She believes her "bad period" was a time when she had to sort herself out. She says her art was "confused" for sometime by the vast number of cultures and life styles she encountered on regular travels with her husband which took them over three-quarters of the globe.

"Sometimes I'd think I didn't really know who I was. There would be a mid-East influence mixed with Spanish or English. Not until recently did the Canadian landscape emerge with a tremendous force in my painting."

HOME

"This country is my true home. I have never lived 18 years in any other land," explained Yana, who is currently at work on a painting of Rattray Marsh in Lorne Park.

Her style is changing as well. She is among 100 realistic painters in Canada. Some art followers say her career has developed in a manner similar to that of realistic painter Ken Danby.

At present, her paintings can be seen in the gallery in Loretto, Ont., as well as Toniara in Bramalea and Mississauga. She is toying with the idea of selling her home on Fowler Dr. and buying a house which could be used for a gallery.

"If I don't do that I may strip this house of its furniture and set up my paintings here," she said.