

Local artist turns his hobby into a job

By JOHN STEWART
Times staff writer

When he first came to Canada 18 years ago, Huibert Sabelis had difficulty finding a job he liked. He admits he was too "temperamental" for many of the 30-odd occupations he tried.

Life was difficult, but even in the hardest of times, Mr. Sabelis could always take refuge in his art. He would make his own ink drawings and decorate his otherwise barren apartment.

One day, an insurance salesman knocked on his door, and for the first time since arriving from his native Holland, Mr. Sabelis sold him one of his works. He took the \$10 and bought more ink and paper.

A short time later, Mr. Sabelis was employed in a London, Ont. paint factory. Although it was "the dirtiest job I ever had," the colors whetted his artistic instincts. His murals still adorn the factory's walls.

While working at yet another job, Mr. Sabelis befriended a Greek artist who provided scraps of canvas and tubes of paint-ends. One day a man in a black limousine came into the place where Mr. Sabelis worked, liked a painting he saw and demanded to see more. The aspiring artist took him to his home and the man bought every painting on the walls.

But it wasn't until four years ago that the Mississauga Valley resident who's lived here since 1973, decided to devote all of his energy to his art.

It's not a decision Mr. Sabelis regrets, although he speaks with some bitterness of the Canadian art establishment's reluctance to accept "distinctive" work such as his. Major commercial and public galleries want to hang what is fashionable and safe, he claims, not what is unique.

"Lots of people have the ability to paint," he says. "But to do something different, to create your own art, that is much more difficult."

Over the past 15 years, Mr. Sabelis has nurtured what he refers to as his style of "figurative romantic fantasy."

His paintings and drawings are filled with themes based on love. "You don't have to look for something deep in my paintings," he says. "I'm a romantic painter and it shows."

Mr. Sabelis spent six childhood years in Indonesia, and the impact is still evident in his work. There is an oriental quality about his penchant for depicting a central subject as seeming to float in space. His figures often are dark women with long, black hair, and an undeniable quality of shyness.

But his life in this country has left its stamp too. "The open space in my painting is something which definitely comes from Canada," he says.

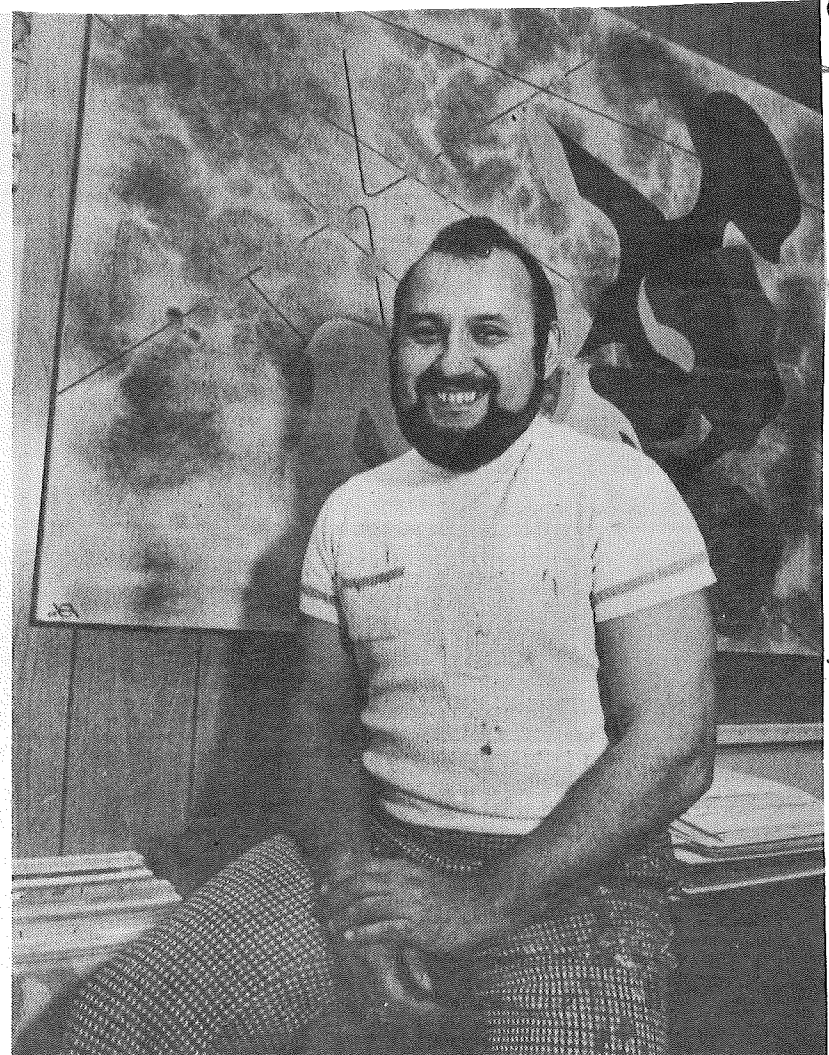
The artist travels extensively, marketing his work. Although he has built up a loyal group of supporters here, he says Canada's art world is reluctant to recognize his type of talent. "Most artists are egomaniacs," he says matter-of-factly. "I'm sure I'm no exception to the rule."

The 38-year-old has already staged a one-man show in New York and he will soon be part of the major Art Expo display there.

He finds it ironic that the city of Los Angeles, where he lived for a year, has purchased several of his paintings but the city of Mississauga doesn't own any.

"How can little places like Grimsby and Cambridge (where he's having one-man shows) have their own art galleries but Mississauga, one of the biggest cities in Canada, has none?"

Despite his misgivings about working in Canada, Mr. Sabelis plans to pursue his search for his perfect personal style, no matter whether it ever finds the wide audience he believes it deserves.



Huibert Sabelis with one of his works

ROB BEINTEMA/THE TIMES

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