

At home with Signe Hanson

By Mindy Pollack-Fusi

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

BEDFORD — It is not by chance that Signe Hanson (usually called "Sing") displays a collection of hands in her dining room. Indeed, "hands" and "hands on" symbolize her life's work, and joy. The hands in her collection, made from brass, tin, glass, and even bone, are from Italy, Egypt, Mexico, North Africa, Seoul, Norway, and other places she has visited or lived. Her love of hands and making things stems back to her childhood in the Midwest, through her years in the museum industry, and now in her new direction as a printmaker.

Hanson, 59, worked in various capacities for the Boston Children's Museum from 1967 until she resigned last year, although through the years, she left and returned whenever work slowed. In her last 11 years, she served as director of exhibitions, overseeing more than 40 exhibits. During a few diversionary years, she played key roles in developing the Kidport Playspace at Logan Airport and the "Where's Boston?" Bicentennial Exhibit, and consulted to the museum industry in the United States and abroad.

She discovered her yearning for hands-on projects during second grade, when ear infections kept her home from school and her father "jacked my whole bed up, put blocks underneath, and I built dioramas and villages in a private, cozy place," she recalls. "I hoped that someday someone would pay me to do this."

She began collecting hands after she met Alexander Girard, the late American architect, designer, and folk art collector whose collection is now displayed in the Santa Fe Museum of International Folk Art. Girard's work captivated Hanson when she and her parents visited a Manhattan restaurant, La Fonda del Sol, decorated by Girard.

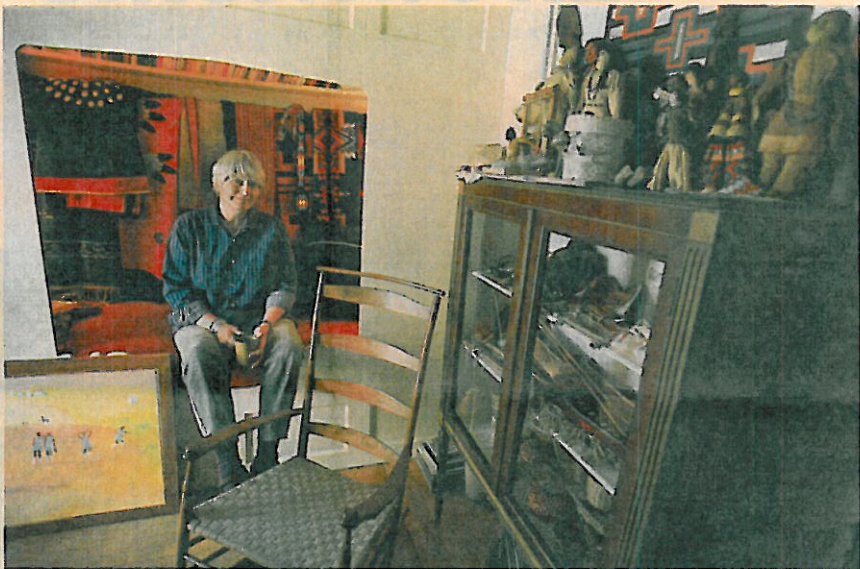
"I fell in love with the folk art," she says.

Years later, when her career was in full bloom, she called Girard from Boston and boldly announced that she was coming to see his home in Santa Fe to learn how he displays his "stuff," she says. Among the "stuff" was an impressive hand collection.

"He mentored me for one day and was an inspiration always," she says.

During those years, she and her husband, Carl, adopted a girl from Korea, named Siri, now 26 and living in California. One of Hanson's fondest memories is an Alaskan fishing trip when Siri, then a teenager, reeled in a 42-pound salmon that now hangs above the entrance to the 1830s Federal period farmhouse the family has lived in for 30 years.

Hanson and her husband, a founding member of Hanson's Hill, Miller, and Hanson, a Burlington noise-control consulting company, plan to celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary this summer by once again fishing with Siri in Alaska. Staying home to guard the house and Hanson's new art studio will be Cody, the



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/SUZANNE R.

Printmaker/artist Signe Hanson, here in her Bedford home, says she discovered a yearning for hands-on projects during her childhood.

family's yellow Labrador retriever, and their two cats, Kiwi and Mat the Cat. Cody sleeps in Hanson's studio on a Norwegian sleigh bed the couple purchased for themselves in an antiques store in Norway, but "no one could sleep on it, it's too short," she says.

With Cody by her side, and Carl often in the garage where he is restoring a 1950s Jaguar, Hanson often works late into the night making prints with many methods. She shoots and transfers images with a Polaroid slide print camera, then hand colors them with ink, paint, or pencil, sometimes cutting and making collages with the pictures. She works on the computer, adapting the images or making multiple thumbnails.

She developed her new interest as a result of community projects she undertook as a founding director of the three-year-old Bedford Center for the Arts. She created its logo, graphics, and posters, and began networking with other Bedford artists and at the Emerson Umbrella for the Arts in Concord. She also took courses at the DeCordova Museum School. Her prints are on display and for sale at the Store at DeCordova and at the Bedford Center for the Arts "Arts for All" festival Saturday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.



Hanson displays part of her hand collection in her home's dining room.

One of Hanson's biggest concerns was that "I'd be alone in my studio and isolated, but the BCA got me out and gave me colleagues," she says, adding that she still does museum consulting, but hopes someday to work only at art.

"I love the combination of technology and hand," she says. "The technology is fast and the handwork slows me down to think about what I'm doing. For years, I've been only an implementer; now it's nice to be reflective, too."

"I keep springing them out. It's mag-



Cody the dog often joins Hanson in her studio, which shows her printmaking process.

Hanson's work will be displayed at the BCA's indoor/outdoor "Arts for All" festival Saturday, 11 a.m.-noon, in the Town Center (781-276-0700 for directions and details).