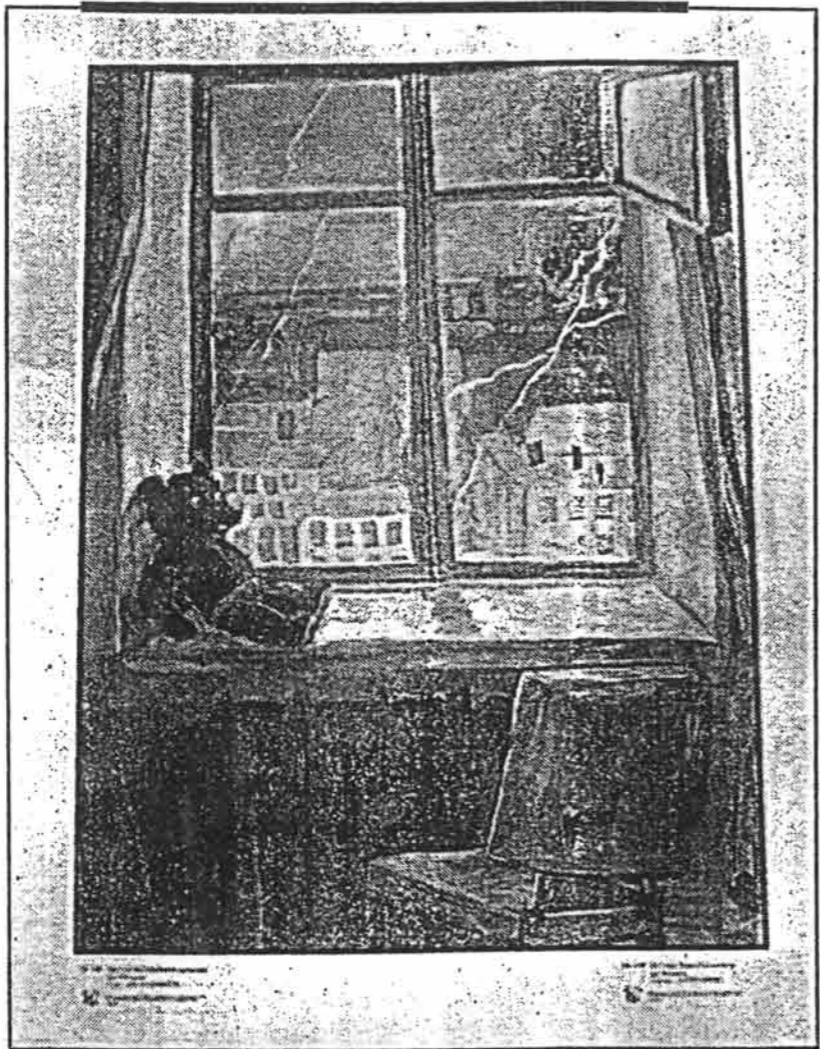
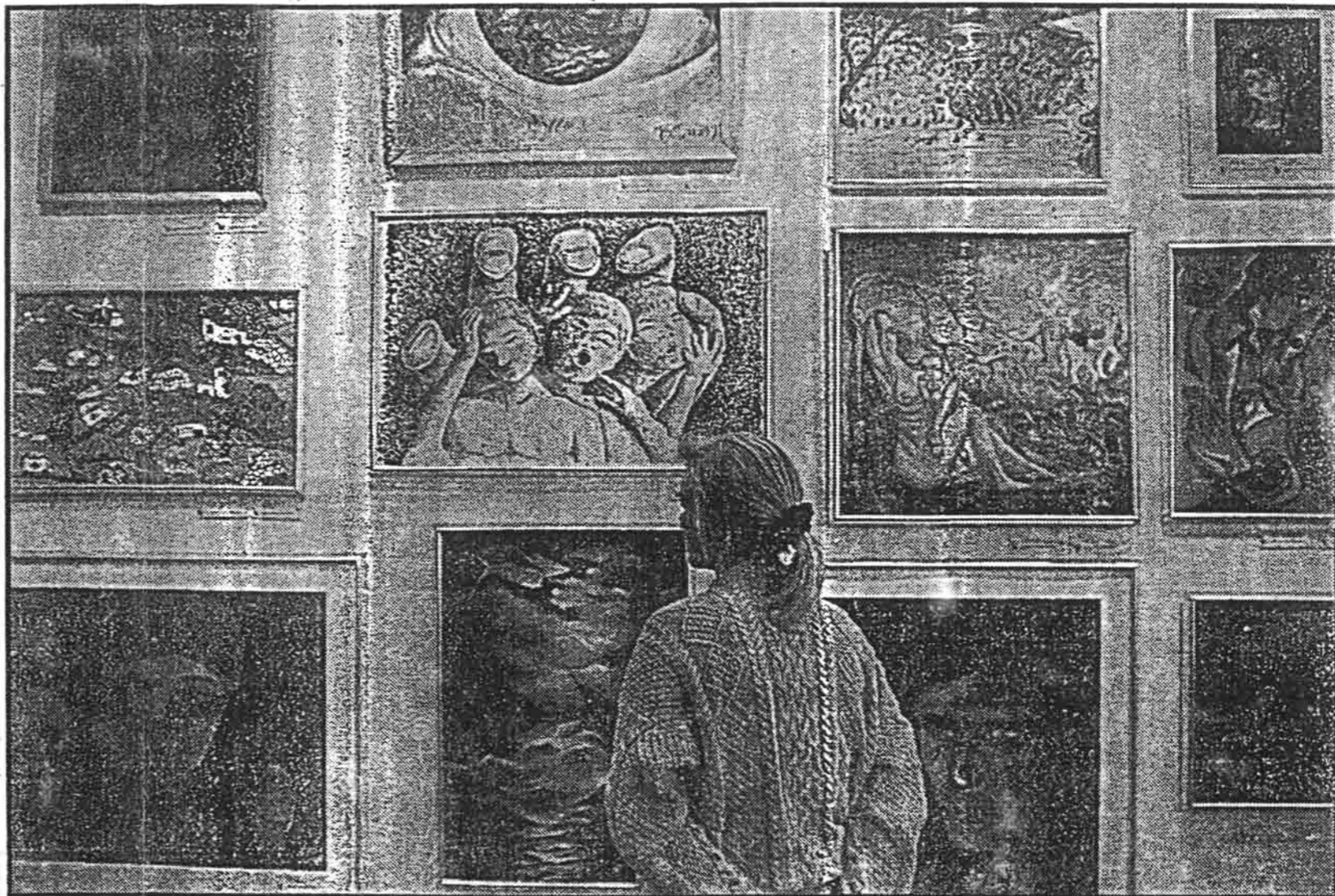


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Photographs by Israel Shenker

Chernobyl pictured, above; artworks crowd the walls, right.



Art by Children On Grown-Up Themes

Creativity and concerns expressed on canvas

By ISRAEL SHENKER

THERE are many museums for children, but Oslo has a museum by children. In a quiet, leafy residential area, inside a substantial villa not far from the university, is the International Museum of Children's Art, where the paintings are by children.

ISRAEL SHENKER often visits Scandinavia.

Not for this museum are cool, individual spaces with canvases hanging in isolated splendor. As though it were in a previous century, the museum exhibits works hung ceiling to floor, walls of burgundy or blue or white glowing with color. Here is richness crowded into intimate association. Along staircases, into the very depths of the building, all of art's vogues and verities clamor for attention. World art is here in precocious maturity. "We have masses of Picassos and Rembrandts and Chagalls among the children," said the museum's founder and direc-

tor, Rafael Goldin.

The works arrive from schools and classes as well as from education authorities and individual children, often after a visit by Mr. Goldin outlining aims and themes. He and his wife, Alla, winnow the art received, and the museum's permanent holdings number about 100,000.

Visitors may be surprised to find a museum installed in a building that was never intended for display without or within. From outside the anonymous, cement-covered brick building, built in 1917, appears to have

lots of right angles. Inside it was plainly once a conservative amalgam of rooms — nothing magnificent or showy. All has now been transformed into a wonderland. Visitors are invited to leave shoes behind and tread the museum's wooden and carpeted floors in stocking feet, or barefoot. Implicitly, they are invited also to abandon prejudice about age and view astonishing works with fresh eye and open heart. "We show children that a museum can mean joy and color, not dusty and boring," Mr. Goldin said.

Aase Kleiveland, Norway's Minister of Culture, lives up the street and delights in her neighbor: "It's like a vitamin injection every time you come here. You feel you're coming into a garden. It's very rich and gives a feeling of generosity. In many ways it's un-Norwegian. In Norway our traditions are a bit more strict and sober."

Recently the museum featured children's paintings, from many countries, on the theme of disasters. All misfortune was there, everything from war and earthquake to loneliness and the death of a pet cat. "Ecology of Reason," by a 15-year-old Russian girl, depicts her grandfather, an unreconstructed Communist, sitting in desolate wasteland against a background of smoking chimneys.

He wears a gas mask, and is reading Pravda. A Soviet boy, aged 13, puts his feelings about Chernobyl into semisymbolic form: through a window can be seen a somber collection of buildings with lightning illuminating the grim scene, and propped up in a corner of the window is a teddy bear. "Drought," a parched landscape, is the creation of a 9-year-old Pakistani girl. A Norwegian girl, 10, exhibits an explosion of color fragments and shadowy central figures — "Divorce in Our Family."

When children see work by their peers, they want to try their own hand. So the museum runs workshops and provides painting materials. "At the start, teachers were skeptical, or reserved," Mr. Goldin said. "They viewed drawing by children as learning, not art."

"People who know about art thought the museum was a crazy idea," he said. "Directors of other museums paid no attention and felt that the word 'art' should be reserved for adults."

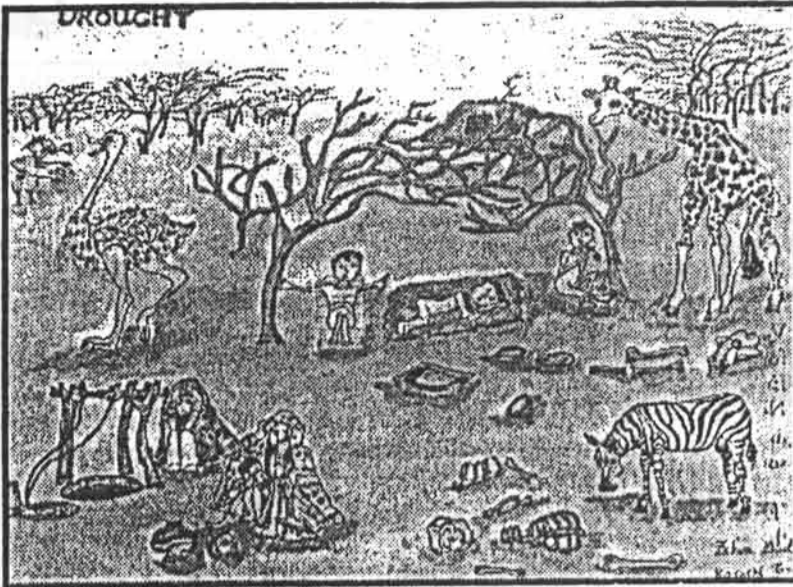
Mr. Goldin acknowledged that not all children were artists, any more than all adults are. "Some have talent, some don't," he

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The New York Times

Travel

Norway



"Drought," by a 9-year-old Pakistani girl.

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noted. His view of life counters conventional wisdom. For him, a child starts as individual and gradually loses individuality. "Some are Cubists, some Abstractionists, some Impressionists. The adult artist invents nothing, but merely copies what lies within the child."

Mr. Goldin, who was born in Kiev in 1920, was 12 when his father deserted the family. "I felt rootless, and it took years before I felt secure and whole." He became a cameraman, then a film director. In 1973, with wife and son, he left the Soviet Union. Two years later he and his wife divorced, and she won custody of their child.

"I lost country, culture, language, wife and son," Mr. Goldin said. Traveling about Norwegian schools, working as he had when a film director, he sought to make a film about father seen by child. The film was ready in 1979, and so were a book and exhibition; not every depiction was of loving harmony. King Olav V of Norway opened the exhibition in Bergen, and Queen Ingrid of Denmark opened it in Copenhagen.

TREASURES FROM THE CHILDREN'S CIVILIZATION" was the first show at the Oslo museum. Next came shows on mother seen by child, and on work, which many of the children saw as vital and romantic.

The museum exhibited Chinese children's art, and Mr. Goldin noted: "There was a painting of an ox by a 3-year-old boy. The boy made the ox with one line. I thought it was lucky for Picasso he was dead — it might have been too strong for him." Opening a loan exhibit in Paris, Thor Heyerdahl, Norway's celebrated explorer, said, "I worked to discover the childhood of civilization, and [Mr. Goldin] works to discover the civilization of childhood."

Meanwhile, Mr. Goldin had married a Russian physician, who practiced at a Norwegian hospital. In their small house outside Oslo, paintings accumulated and space declined. "Pictures were everywhere," said Mrs. Goldin. "They filled the living room and went into the bedroom. We were driven to the kitchen, but the paintings kept coming. It was not a life."

The Goldins dreamed of founding a museum of children's art, and saw a large Oslo house advertised for sale. An Austrian philanthropist gave them about \$112,000, the Norwegian Government offered additional funds and a bank provided a mortgage. "For two years we slept in the museum on mattresses on the floor," Mrs. Goldin said. "First the paintings belonged to us, then we belonged to the paintings."

She gave up medicine to work at the museum. "We treat many, many people in this place," she said. "We treat people with children's art." It was she who installed the museum, and she prepares works for exhibit, covering each painting with transpar-

ent plastic film.

One of Mrs. Goldin's most impressive achievements is the principal staircase with its substantial stairwell. It resembles a rain forest, with luxuriant plants and twisting ivy and the recorded sound of songbirds. The walls are aglow with canvases, including a number of jungle animals. At the top of the building, the attic space is furnished with roof window panels through which one can admire the sheltering sky and feel closer to nature.

Five years ago, the Norwegian Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, opened the museum. Lars Roar Langslet, the Culture Minister at the time, was taken aback by Mr. Goldin's approach and viewed him as a one-man pressure group. "When people say, No, he pretends not to understand Norwegian," Mr. Langslet said. Since Norway has no tradition of private sponsorship, Government ministries and the state oil company help pay the bills. Aside from admission fees, the museum gets only occasional small donations from private sources.

"Disasters" was opened jointly last May by the American and Soviet Ambassadors, in the presence of children from Chernobyl. For Mr. Goldin, this was halfway to his goal of hosting a superpower summit. "When you have a summit on a warship, what sort of peace can that produce?" he asked. "If you meet under a painting by a 6-year old child, entitled 'I Want my Mama, I Want to Go Home,' the children's views can penetrate the world of the politician."

A slimmer "Disasters" exhibition replaced the Chernobyl section. The Greek children's art is now at the Oslo museum. From Feb. 15 to August the museum will show "Disasters II," with all new material from the Disasters project, with "Disasters III" opening in September.

Children from some 150 countries have works at the museum, and Mr. Goldin seeks funds to expand the display space available. "This is the Louvre of children's art," he said. "We would like to see such a museum in each country."

If you go

The International Museum of Children's Art, 4 Lille Froens Vel, Oslo, telephone: (02) 468573. Admission is \$4.80; \$2.40 for those aged 2 to 16 and for students and seniors.

From Sept. 10 to Dec. 15 and Jan. 25 to June 23, the museum is open Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 9:30 A.M. to 2 P.M. Open Sunday from 11 A.M. to 4 P.M. Closed Monday, Friday and Saturday.

From late June to mid-August, the museum is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday from 11 A.M. to 4 P.M. and closed Monday, Friday and Saturday.

The museum is closed from August through the first week in September and at Easter week.