

"...Heart To Conceive, The Understanding To
Direct, and The Hand To Execute . . ."

An Interview With Anita Freund Morganstern

By SHEILA DOBRUSHIN

THE KING HOUSE, home of Pittsburgh Plan for Art, sits magnificently at the end of the long, tree-lined drive, off S. Negley Avenue. The walls of this old estate, if they were able to speak, would probably have much to tell about the grand parties and regal living of its former inhabitants. If the King Family were to revisit their old home they would no doubt find a charming contrast between the old structure and the abstract, modern art which it houses. It is literally a world of color in an infinite amount of shapes and sizes; vivid pictures in oil and water media hang from the walls; gay and wild mobiles are suspended from the ceiling.

One of the organizers of Pittsburgh Plan for Art and one who has been a main impetus since its inception is Mrs. Anita Freund Morganstern, PPA's executive secretary. In 1955, when PPA was

still an idea being formulated by its sponsors, Mrs. Morganstern played an active part in giving life to the plan. She directed PPA's move into the King House and has been with them ever since.

Mrs. Morganstern describes PPA as educational in that it cooperates with the art programs of Carnegie Institute of Fine Arts, the local colleges, the Arts and Crafts Center and any group showing worthwhile art. But primarily, she says, PPA is best known as an art rental and sales agency. Most other similar projects throughout the country are usually connected with museums.

PPA encourages both professional and amateur artists to submit their works for exhibition and potential purchase or rental. Their entries are then reviewed by a board. Mrs. Morganstern states that while she sits in on these sessions, she does not give an opinion as to the selection of

paintings because many of her friends contribute work and she wants to show no partiality. PPA has reached the point where entries are national and international, as well as local. Three foreign countries have sent representatives to study the sales statistics. "But sales are not our prime motive," Mrs. Morganstern says. "We strive for a closer understanding and harmony between the artist and the public, trying to stimulate an interest in the works of contemporary art by teaching the language of modern art to adults. We hope to do this through our discussion series 'Looking At Modern Art,' the idea behind it being that by living with a painting you can understand it." Mrs. Morganstern feels that you cannot judge any two paintings by the same rules. The emotion of the artist has a great deal to do with its interpretation. She says, "You must try to figure out what



Anita Freund Morganstern

the intent of the artist was."

It is not surprising that under the guidance of Mrs. Morganstern the PPA has become such a success. She has an impressive background of experience with art group work behind her. During the formative years (1948-1950) of the Arts and Crafts Center in Pittsburgh, Mrs. Morganstern was Art Gallery chairman and though the Center was on a limited budget she is given credit for improving the quality of the exhibitions.

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From the Center Mrs. Morganstern became public relations director (1951-1954) of the Associated Artists of Pittsburgh, and in that time sales tripled at the Association exhibit and there was a marked increase in attendance. She was also one of the three organizers of Everyman's Art Show For Amateurs, a pioneer movement in Pittsburgh that served as a model in many other cities. Just before her association with PPA, Mrs. Morganstern tried the television medium in art, producing WQED's YOU THE ARTIST show from April to September in 1954.

During the course of the interview Mrs. Morganstern pointed out that she has always been surrounded by creative people who were constantly busy working as specialists in a variety of interests including handwork, ceramics, golf and music. "The diversified, but simple and happy life of the family in the George S. Kaufman play 'You Can't Take It With You' must have been written to describe our activities." (Incidentally, George S. Kaufman is her third cousin).

Looking back, Mrs. Morganstern recalls most vividly the pleasant Saturday dinners at her house. "We all gathered around the dinner table with our dates. The boys used to say that if they couldn't get a date with the particular Freund girl that happened to be dating at the time, they would try to get a date with her sister, just so they could come to the house on Saturday night."

The Freuds were quite a large family consisting of four girls and a boy, the "baby" of the family. Mrs. Morganstern, who was the

middle child, describes her mother and father as warm people with whom her friends spent hours discussing everything from baseball to art and music. "My mother and father were known to all of my friends as just plain 'mom and pop.' Our home didn't have an intellectual, snobbish atmosphere, but it was a place for great fun and wonderful occasions."

Mrs. Morganstern says that her own family, in its own way, is much like her parents' family. She describes her home on Fair Oaks Street in Squirrel Hill as a small house full of contemporary paintings and sculpture with modern furnishings. She says "If you just happened into the kitchen most likely you'd see a set of my husband's electrical plans on the table, next to the typewriter or my daughter's sewing machine. We are the type of a family that works in every room of the house, has diversified interests, yet still remain a unit."

Mrs. Morganstern's husband, Richard, is an electrical contractor; their daughter, Judy, 19, is a junior at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland; and their son, Jim, 22, graduated last year from Williams College in the School of Liberal Arts and is now studying architecture at Yale.

Individually, apart from her work and home, Mrs. Morganstern's hobbies include swimming, gourmet cooking, entertaining and travel. Mr. and Mrs. Morganstern have been to Europe twice, Mexico, Yukatan, Guatemala, the West Indies and have covered most of the 50 states, including parts of Canada.

Mrs. Morganstern's interests in travel led to her affiliation with

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"The Experiment In International Living," an organization that sponsors exchange visits with children of other countries. Mrs. Morganstern, who was chairman of this project in Pittsburgh, was herself hostess to several French children. The Morgansterns visited the families of these children while in France in 1958. Their son, Jim, also spent a summer with a French family as part of the Experiment.

Sculpture and music also play prominent roles in Mrs. Morganstern's busy life. She majored in music for three years at Carnegie Institute of Technology, but changed horses in mid-stream, as she says, and earned her B.A. degree in sculpture. Following her graduation she studied sculpture with Hans Hoffman and John Houture in the Associated Artists vannes in New York. Mrs. Morgan-

stern has shown her work in sculpture shows, Butler Art Institute in Youngstown and in the exhibits of the Sculpture Society in Pittsburgh. One of her most well-known pieces is "Grieving Woman," which won the Associated Artists Sculpture Prize in 1953. It is an attempt to express through the tensions of positive forms and the negative surrounding atmosphere, the emotions of grief. This piece, which was featured at the Pittsburgh Playhouse, was done one summer at Long Beach Island, carved from a piece of walnut Mrs. Morganstern had saved for twenty years.

As colorful as the media of art itself, Mrs. Morganstern has combined her thriving career, her busy family life, her many unusual interests and hobbies into a formula of happiness and success!

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