



OHIO CITY ARGUS

Covering Cleveland's Premier Historic Neighborhood

Ingrid Hoegner: Artist in Residence

BY BERNIE THIEL

Ingrid Hoegner's route to Ohio City is much like that taken by many other neighborhood residents: She was lured by the diversity and amenities of an urban environment and captivated by a home that she just had to have.

One of a growing number of artists who call Ohio City home, Ingrid is a true child of the suburbs who, as an adult, made the move to the city. She grew up in the Clifton Park neighborhood of Lakewood but always found herself attracted to Ohio City, where her brothers had rented for several years. So, when she decided it was time to purchase her first home, there was little question where she would end up.

"I had my heart set on getting a place that was already rehabbed," she said. But she ended up finding a very large, circa-1850s Victorian that she fell in love with. "It was a fixer-upper," she said, perhaps slightly understating the challenge.

Undeterred, Ingrid took the plunge and bought the house in 2000 and began the arduous process of undoing past "improvements" and repairing parts of the structure that had been ravaged by years of neglect and abuse. In 2003, she realized one of her dreams, when her home was featured—as an "in-progress" stop—on the Ohio City Home Tour. "It was so much fun," she remembers. "Here I was, a single woman renovating this big house all by myself—it was really great."



Ohio City artist Ingrid Hoegner and her husband Bill share some quality time on their deck with their children Oliver and Madeline and dog Summer. (Photograph by Bernie Thiel)

At the time, Ingrid's art career was just beginning. She was working during the day in advertising sales at the *Plain Dealer* (where she began designing ads) while tending to her nascent career as a painter at night. Even as a student at Kent State, she recognized that a career in art can be a financial struggle. "I realized

being a full-time artist was being a starving artist." So she majored in graphic design while minoring in fine art.

She credits her parents with fueling her interest in and appreciation for art at a young age. Her mother, who came to the United States from Germany when she was 22, was a self-taught illustrator

whose work appeared in ads for a number of major department stores all over the country. Her father also has an art background and has had a long career in advertising. "They bought me books on art history and artists, took me to museums and galleries, introduced me to different styles," Ingrid recalls. "And I watched my mom illustrate every day." Ingrid fondly recalls a Christmas time tradition when the Hoegner family—joined by two of Ingrid's aunts (also artists, who worked for ad agencies in New York City)—would spend time together drawing. Indeed, the art gene runs deep in Ingrid's family: Ingrid's two brothers are, yes, artists as well.

During the early part of the decade, at her studio in her "in progress" Ohio City home, Ingrid continued to hone her style, which she describes as expressionism—"very colorful, big brush strokes, a lot of paint," she says. One day, while in the D'Vine Wine Bar downtown, she noticed the space's large bare walls and an absence of art, save for a few small pieces. Immediately inspired, she went home and began creating, as she described them, "four huge, very loud paintings of wine glasses." When finished, she took them to D'Vine. "They loved them and told me to hang them up," Ingrid recalls. "Then they said, 'You can keep our walls full of art—keep painting.' That's how I started, about 10 years ago."

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The ICA: Conserving and Preserving the Past

BY BERNIE THIEL

Do you believe in destiny? Albert Albano does.

When Albano, the director of the

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Intermuseum Conservation Association (ICA), was looking for a new home for his organization, he had an open mind about possible locations. But the west side of Cleveland was not immediately high on his list.

"I live on the east side and I wasn't all that familiar with the west side," Albano now admits. "But an ICA board member spotted this building and thought it had potential. I came to look at it, and as soon as I saw it, I concluded there was nothing we needed that this building did not have."

And here's where destiny comes in. ICA is one of the foremost groups specializing in the conservation and restoration of what the organization calls "cultural materials." These materials include artwork such as paintings one would find in a museum, but also tapestries, sculptures, public murals, objects and even archeological artifacts that have historical and cultural significance. And staring Albano in the face was one of the biggest examples of cultural materials the ICA had ever encountered.

To the regular passerby, the building didn't look like much. Situated on the south side of Detroit Avenue just west of West 29th Street, it had sat unused for years and was in an admittedly rough state of repair. But Albano recalls being impressed with the building's "street presence," as well as its architectural aesthetic, which includes impressive glazed terra cotta tiles and balustrades surrounding a line of graceful arched windows at the top of the facade and a massive dis-



While the Intermuseum Conservation Association began its life largely restoring famous paintings collected by museums, the organization has since expanded to focus on a wide range of cultural materials of historical significance. (Photograph by Angela Hummel)

play window along the bottom. It was only after the ICA began the purchase process that Albano discovered just how important the structure was.

"At the time, I didn't really know the extent of the building's historical value because it had undergone so many interior renovations that the interesting remaining historic space was completely buried by multiple renovations," he remembers. "But once we started pulling some things down in the interior, we made some discoveries."

One of these "things" was a piece of glass that had an original label on the back of it that read "the Vitrolite Company." Spurred by that label, Albano

began to research the company and made a happy discovery: The building that was to be the new home of the ICA was, in fact, the last surviving showroom and sales office of the Vitrolite Company, which had immense architectural design significance in the first part of the 20th century. The company's signature product, pigmented Vitrolite glass (often black), was a major design element in the buildings constructed or "modernized" as part of the Art Deco and streamlined moderne movements of the 1930s and 1940s. "I thought, this is an incredible synergy," says Albano. "With our organiza-

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Conserving and Preserving

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Some of the cultural artifacts that the Intermuseum Conservation Association are working to preserve are a far cry from paintings. Two of the organization's current projects include a collection of silver and bronze objects from 20th century Burma (left), owned by Denison University, and ancient Native American artifacts uncovered in Chillicothe, Ohio (right). (Photographs by Angela Hummel)



Because it specializes in all media, the ICA can take on virtually any challenge. Here, painting conservator Heather Galloway works on restoring one of the large murals from the now-demolished Valleyview Estates in Tremont. The covering on the mural is "facing tissue" designed to keep the paint in place during restoration.

tion finding this building and becoming stewards of it, you could look at it as some kind of fate—which I did."

The ICA's journey to its new historically significant home, which was built in 1926 for a then-princely sum of \$100,000, actually began more than a decade ago, when the organization made a conscious decision to broaden the scope of its work. The ICA was founded in Oberlin, Ohio, in 1952 as the first non-profit art preservation and conservation organization in the United States. Its original backers were six influential midwest museums—including the Cleveland Museum of Art—whose directors sought to pool their resources to fund a world-class facility that would enable them to keep their prestigious and highly valuable collections in top-notch condition.

Given its roots, it's not surprising the ICA initially focused strictly on restoring artwork for its membership—which, over the next six decades, grew to include

approximately 100 museums, corporations with large art collections, and a smattering of private individuals. However, as the years passed, the ICA's focus slowly evolved from providing conservation services and education to member museums to, as Albano describes it, taking a more inclusive approach to the preservation and conservation of cultural materials in the community at large. As part of that broadening of scope, the ICA determined that a new location in a larger metropolitan area would be more conducive to its work. "We wanted to be part of a bigger community cultural dialogue," Albano says. "We wanted to attract a greater diversity of board members, to be more accessible logistically, and to offer the kinds of amenities that would help us attract highly talented staff." Only 30 miles to the northeast, Cleveland was the natural choice.

After several years of preparation, and the completion of the initial year-long phase of renovation of its building in Ohio City, the ICA moved into its new home in 2003. Although the organization would have preferred to refurbish the entire building at once, cost considerations made it necessary to concentrate first on restoring the Detroit Avenue facade and installing a state-of-the-art laboratory and art-storage facility within the historic shell of the building.

Today, in the light-filled third floor, which is outfitted with an open floor plan and offers sweeping views of Lake Erie to

the north, 20 staff members carry out an impressive array of work as they treat approximately 350 objects a year. In one corner, two ICA professionals repair a large mural rescued from the recently demolished Valleyview Homes Estates public housing complex in Cleveland's Tremont neighborhood. In another corner, ancient Native American artifacts uncovered in Chillicothe, Ohio, are undergoing restoration. Across the aisle sits an old and extremely rare Confederate Civil War flag from Tennessee, now badly fraying and worn, that soon will be restored to its original state. And nearby is a collection of silver and bronze objects from 20th century Burma, owned by Denison University, which the ICA's object conservators are cleaning.

Pieces on which the ICA has worked truly run the gamut. Some of the most recent works include the mammoth and mastodon sculptures, created by famed artist Viktor Schrenkengost, that formerly adorned the elephant house at the Cleveland MetroParks Zoo; a 14th century altarpiece painting owned by St. Bonaventure University; and the four large murals in the lobby of State Theater in Cleveland's Playhouse Square.

Perhaps one of the most unusual projects for the ICA is one of its upcoming jobs: restoring the carousel that originally entertained families at New York's Coney Island Park. "It's one of the most important historical carousels in the United States," Albano notes.

When they're not working on objects, the ICA's staff can be found spreading the good news about cultural heritage preservation. The organization's education department conducts a variety of programs for both the staff of museums as well as the public, including hands-on workshops, symposia and lectures.

Below the labs and offices is one of the finest art-storage spaces in the world. Climate controlled and featuring a 27-point security-detection system, this 41,000 cubic-foot facility provides short- and long-term storage for all types of artwork—from a precious family photograph to paintings by an important 18th century master. In fact, this space was the temporary home for most of the collection from the Akron Art Museum while that institution underwent its recent renovation and expansion.

The ICA is no longer the only organization of its kind. There are now 11 non-profit conservation centers in the United States like the ICA, as well as a number of organizations in Canada and Europe. But the ICA remains unique in one important way: It's one of the only ones in the United

States with a specialization in all media. Of course, being able to diagnose and repair problems with virtually any type of material demands a highly educated and experienced staff. Indeed, all the professionals at the ICA have completed graduate-level programs in art conservation, and have served in internships and staff roles at some of the most prestigious institutions in the country, including the National Gallery and the Getty Museum. Albano himself, before joining the ICA 13 years ago, worked in conservation positions at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and Winterthur Museum in Delaware.

Now in its sixth year in the old Vitrolite showroom, the ICA clearly has grown comfortable in its Ohio City surroundings. But that doesn't mean the organization has become complacent—especially as it relates to the significant historical artifact that's now in its care. During the final phase of renovation of its building, the ICA plans to completely restore the original reception area—the only place inside the building with original details remaining—to include meeting space that can be used by Ohio City community groups as well as the ICA itself. "Once this phase is complete, we'll have a much greater street presence for the community and be able to use this space as a tool for helping people understand a little more about how incredible it is to recapture certain components of history—and do so in a very accessible way," says Albano.

To date, the ICA has invested approximately \$2.3 million in its building and Albano figures there's another \$800,000 needed to complete the restoration. "Some people may think that's kind of nuts," he muses. "But it's the only surviving example of the Vitrolite Company showroom in the United States, so we think it's worth it." ★

The Intermuseum Conservation Association is located at 2915 Detroit Avenue. More information on the organization's full range of preservation and conservation services can be found at www.ica-artconservation.org.



Albert Albano, the director of the ICA, has worked for some of the most prestigious museums before joining the organization 13 years ago. His boundless energy and enthusiasm are clear assets in a city that often struggles to be optimistic.

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