

# Sculptor is a rarity — he manages to earn his keep



By VIRGINIA NIXON  
of The Gazette

Chances are you haven't heard of Leo Schimanszky or his highly polished semi-abstract bronze sculptures.

But while Schimanszky has yet to achieve the recognition he seeks, he's accomplished something most other artists haven't. He's supporting himself from his art.

How has he been able to do this? Most sculptors, with the exception of an established senior non-experimental handful including Jordi Bonet, Esther Wertheimer and Kieff, either follow dual careers or suffer penury between grants and rare sales is no miracle.

It's a matter of salesmanship, aided by the fact Schimanszky's forte, the gleaming polished surface of his works, has a powerful viewer drawing power.

He's also helped "keep his head above water" by designing small gift items like napkin rings and small aluminum figures. But he figures he'll soon be ready to sell this enterprise.

Schimanszky exhibits too — this fall at London, Ont.'s City Centre and Hawkesbury's Opus Gallery — and some of his work is in stock at the Bernard Desroches Gallery in Montreal.

But it's literally his own untiring efforts that have put him and his household — wife Janine, baby son, and the comfortable older house he bought and redid in suburban Dorion — in the black.

"If the mountain doesn't come to you, you have to go to it," he says, outlining a

method common enough in the world of business, but less so in the art world.

For instance, Schimanszky makes a point of knowing who's responsible for building projects.

The Cadillac-Fairview Corporation commissioned an eight-foot sculpture from him for the Galleries d'Anjou. This piece, like much of his work, is a sinuous semi-abstract reminiscent of a smooth-skinned Henry Moore, with touches of Jean Arp.

"On that piece I worked with three students plus a whole polishing crew for six months. One night I came home late and my wife wouldn't let me in. I was all covered with bronze powder and it had oxydized — I was turning green!"

Abstract but not experimental, at its best Schimanszky's work appeals through simple harmonies of curves and flowing lines. It's not the stuff that draws reviews in *Artscanada*, but he has plenty of admirers.

"It's important to be different, to have a distinctive style," he says. "But I'm not creating according to clients' wishes. I'm a firm believer in my works. I would live with them for the rest of my life." His prices range from \$400 to \$5000, depending on size and complexity.

Schimanszky's schedule "come down to timing and contacts," he says.

"It's not so easy today to get in touch with a big industrial head just by picking up the phone. If you've got that privilege you've worked for it. But then again sometimes

I've called up people telling them I'm an artist and they say "sure come on over."

He also sends out letters offering his services as a sculptor to firms in Canada and the U.S., averaging five replies to every hundred letters — a worthwhile response, he considers.

"And if I make one sale I don't disappear. A lot of collectors have not one, but two, three or more," he says. His biggest collectors, he says, are Swiss living in Canada.

"I think someday I'll have to make a special medallion for the Swiss!"

Schimanszky concedes his hectic pace has its drawbacks.

"In fact sometimes it drives me nuts," he says frankly. "But I believe very much in the personal contact

It's a sort of excitement for people to talk with the artist. And I cannot afford to let up."

Vienna-born, he came to Montreal in 1966. Trying his hand at various jobs he eventually wound up as musician, playing the accordion, drums and piano, and singing too — "real old Viennese songs."

Stamina obviously helps in the kind of lifestyle Schimanszky leads, and he has it now and had it then.

"Once I worked with a band-trio till 1:30 in the morning. Then I drove to a restaurant downtown, put on

an apron and worked as a waiter till 8 in the morning. Then I went home to bed and after lunch I got up and went back to my drawing table. I still have some drawings where you can see the shake of my hand!"

**At Galerie St. Denis**  
(3774 St. Denis to Oct. 21). Norma Haller Spector, who has developed since her last show, exhibits hallucinatory oils of floppy-thighed, balloon-breasted, just short of cretinous-faced, imaginary family members.

(If Aunt Sybil, brother Leon, Cousin Hubert et al are not imaginary, Spector must have an angry pack of relations on her heels.) A crowd-pleasing kind of show, it's a mixture of caricature and sporadic good painting. Prices are \$1000 to \$1650 for the paintings, \$300 for the rather less interesting drawings.

A graphic scribble-smudge against a horizon line is the predominant image in Paul Lussier's pastel works. The effect is like a whirlwind, the lovely No. 5 — an oddly close to a Woolworth Sunset in the less successful No. 24. On the whole, though, this is an interesting and often impressive show. the new little print gallery **L'Aquatinte** (1320 Shebrooke West, last day tomorrow). Prices are \$170 to \$345.

It's salesmanship and advance planning that help sculptor Leo Schimanszky