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"And 'Enrichment' Was Just The Start"

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SELF-MODEL — Gere Kavanaugh is swathed in a purple and lavender silk design, one of her many creations, as are the wall hangings and the column mobiles. Miss Kavanaugh will be commencement speaker

at the Memphis Academy of Arts graduation this afternoon. The exhibit of her designs is on display at the academy.

—Staff Photo by Fred Griffith

And 'Enrichment' Was Just The Start

WHEN FRANK KAVANAUGH enrolled his 8-year-old daughter in the Saturday classes at the Memphis Academy of Arts, he told her "I don't expect you to do anything with these classes, as far as a career is concerned, but I do want your life to be enriched by them."

That was 32 years ago, and today Gere Kavanaugh returns to the art academy, her alma mater, as an internationally known designer to address the graduating class at the academy's commencement this afternoon.

"Every Saturday all through grade school I would go to these classes. That was when the school was on Poplra, then it moved to the James Lee home on Adams. These were really great years and I don't mean this in a gooey, sentimental way. The years there had a lasting impression on my life."

A SCHOLARSHIP and work—painting scenes of "The Last Supper" inside caskets for Irish gypsy clients — allowed her to continue at the art academy and Memphis State and be graduated with a bachelor's of fine arts degree.

"The academy gave me a humor, a joy, an attitude, a way of looking at life.

I didn't specialize in any one field. Specialization can be death, one's work becomes too stale. More and more, people are having to train themselves to be more agile in their work. We have gotten too stereotyped in all fields.

"I think a student should first have a general education, four years of liberal arts study, no matter what his field, whether eventually it be medicine, law or accounting. Then continue with work in a preferred field. Unless one is equipped to learn with a good structural background behind him, education doesn't mean much.

"The world is really the oyster, just for the learning."

ARMED WITH a gregarious personality that can be pensive, the luck and lilt of her Irish ancestry and the creative, energetic and enthusiastic characteristics of her Arien personality, she set out to conquer her oyster world. While at the academy, Kenneth Kimbrough, the interior designer, had been interested in her fabric designs and she worked for him, custom designing for some of his clients.

This interest in material continued and she has designed fabrics from Korea to Ireland. In 1969 her materials won her the International AID fabric award.

Now on the drawing board are some of her designs for apartment furniture.

"Apartment furniture design is going to explode in the next few years. For one thing, land value is going to be so high, that more units will be built per acre. Furniture will be better scaled for apartments and more moveable. And accessories will become increasingly more popular."

SHE ALSO is working with the designers of two Texas shopping centers, one in Austin, another in Houston, designing large, decorative sculpture for open court yards.

At least once a year, she returns to Memphis to visit her aunt, Mrs. Gus Zanone. Her childhood family home was on Galloway, across from the zoo.

"When I first heard about the expressway going through the zoo I was enraged. That's MY zoo they are tearing up, I thought. And I'm still crazy at the thought.

"There's really no problem . . . the people can stop it if they want. The people in San Francisco stopped the building of one. All they have to do is protest, really voice their feeling . . . it'll work."

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