

WHO'S WHO IN THE HILLS

The Piece de Resistance Of This Show Is The Artist Herself

By RACHEL MULLEN

An exhibit of a rare and dying-out art, the art of silhouettes by Margaretha von Glehn Luther of Ridge Oak, Basking Ridge, as well as several works of inlaid wood and bone done by her husband, Fred, are currently on display at the Bernards Township Library where they will remain through this month.

These are not your run-of-the-mill silhouettes, but detailed designs of flowers, fairy tales, portraits, religious pieces, so delicate that they appear to be etchings or fine pen and ink drawings.

But the piece de resistance is Mrs. Luther herself who is there at the library, watching over her treasures. Mrs. Luther is one of those rare people who radiates vitality and enthusiasm. A small, elderly lady who says laughingly, when asked her age, that she is at least a 1,000. She has clear blue eyes and grey hair pulled back into a neat bun, and sits clipping away at her newest silhouette while talking about her art.

For Margaretha von Glehn Luther, every work of art is a labor of love. Whether a portrait, tale, dragon, flower, religious piece or illuminated manuscript, everything she creates has a special meaning.

Taking the visitor on a guided tour of each of her treasures, she explains the significance and importance of each.

The dragon, executed for one her sons, is suitably ferocious with fire shooting from his nostrils, and he twists and writhes across a white field (rice paper). And yet this dragon, like all her dragons, is not really that ferocious, more a beneficent dragon with fanciful designs and florets decorating his sleek body and tail. A silhouette of a large mosquito, glued to the

glass, keeps at a safe distance from the jaws of the dragon.

"The question is will the dragon eat the mosquito, or will the mosquito tweek the dragon on the nose," said Mrs. Luther.

Moving on to the next picture Mrs. Luther explained that she created this fairy tale for "Captain Noah," a children's TV show in Philadelphia, by Pastor W. Carter Merbreier. She is very proud of the fact that she was on the program six times in 1974-'75, and that during that time the show was awarded a prize for being one of the best children's TV shows.

The delightful fairy tale, full of fantasy, depicts a large tree, under which is a wishing well and a large dragon. Little tree people live in the tree, and they must watch their step lest they fall into the wishing well, in which case they will be transformed into another form.

Sons Inspired Tales

The inspiration for these imaginative tales came from her two sons. "They

insisted that I tell them fairy tales, not ones they had read in books, so I had to make up my own," Mrs. Luther said.

"This next picture of "Noah's Ark," a portrayal of the ark tossing on the turbulent, swirling waters of the ocean, "is pretty much a story of my own life," she declared.

An Estonian by birth, Mrs. Luther has spent much of her life fleeing from oppressors, first in 1917 during the Bolshevik Revolution; then again in 1939 when the Communists took over her country, and then finally in World War II in Germany where she and her husband had gone to escape communism. As a result of that war she and her husband, a descendant of Martin Luther, a founder of the Protestant religion, were separated for four years during which time he was forced to serve as an interpreter for the Russians.

At times she lost hope of ever seeing him again. But by some miracle they met again in 1945 in the tiny town of Glueksburg in northernmost Germany and there they were able to settle down.

But both had dreamed of coming to America to raise their two sons, and thanks, she said, to Eisenhower's expanded immigration laws they later on were able to do so. Pastor Otto, a representative of the Lutheran Church in Fremont, Ohio, came to Germany to interview Mrs. Luther and, impressed by her beautiful silhouettes,

arranged to sponsor the Luthers' trip to America.

Finally in 1955 their life of fleeing ended, and sponsored by relatives in Marietta, Ohio, the Luthers' went there to live.

Later they moved to Philadelphia and finally, last April, to Ridge Oak, a senior citizen's housing complex in Basking Ridge to be near their chemist son, Lars. Their other son, Hoger, is a physicist in Topsfield, Mass.

In gratitude to Pastor Otto she cut a crucifix for his church, the first of many such crucifixes and religious works she was to do.

Work Hangs In Palace

"I don't think I would have survived without my faith in God," she states.

Flowers are another one of her loves, and she has cut silhouettes of columbines, spider mums, dahlias, wild roses and wildflowers that are mind-boggling. They are so fine and delicate that they actually look like pen and ink drawings.

"All my family is wild about roses," confessed Mrs. Luther. "Needless to say, we are constantly battling something with roses ... Japanese Beetles, mildew ..."

Another of her many talents is illuminated manuscripts, of which she has two on display; one is of the Christmas story in Uncial script executed for one of her sons, and the other the Prayer of St. Francis.

Asked how she ever got started with her silhouettes, Mrs. Luther replied that when she was around 12 years old she saw a silhouette of the Virgin Mary in a show window display. "I was spellbound and dashed home," she recalled. "When I got home I didn't even stop to take off my coat, but grabbed a pair of scissors and started cutting, and I have been cutting ever since," she laughed.

With her only tool a pair of small scissors, about two

inches long, similar to embroidery scissors, she fashions her intricate designs from black paper. Her scissors are very unique as they were made especially to fit her fingers by a company in Germany.

She will often put her paper in the refrigerator to keep it cold and to prevent it from becoming too brittle, before she starts working. Most designs are made from one piece, but the more complicated ones are executed from several pieces.

All who view this exhibit will agree with one reviewer who described the artist as "a great contem-

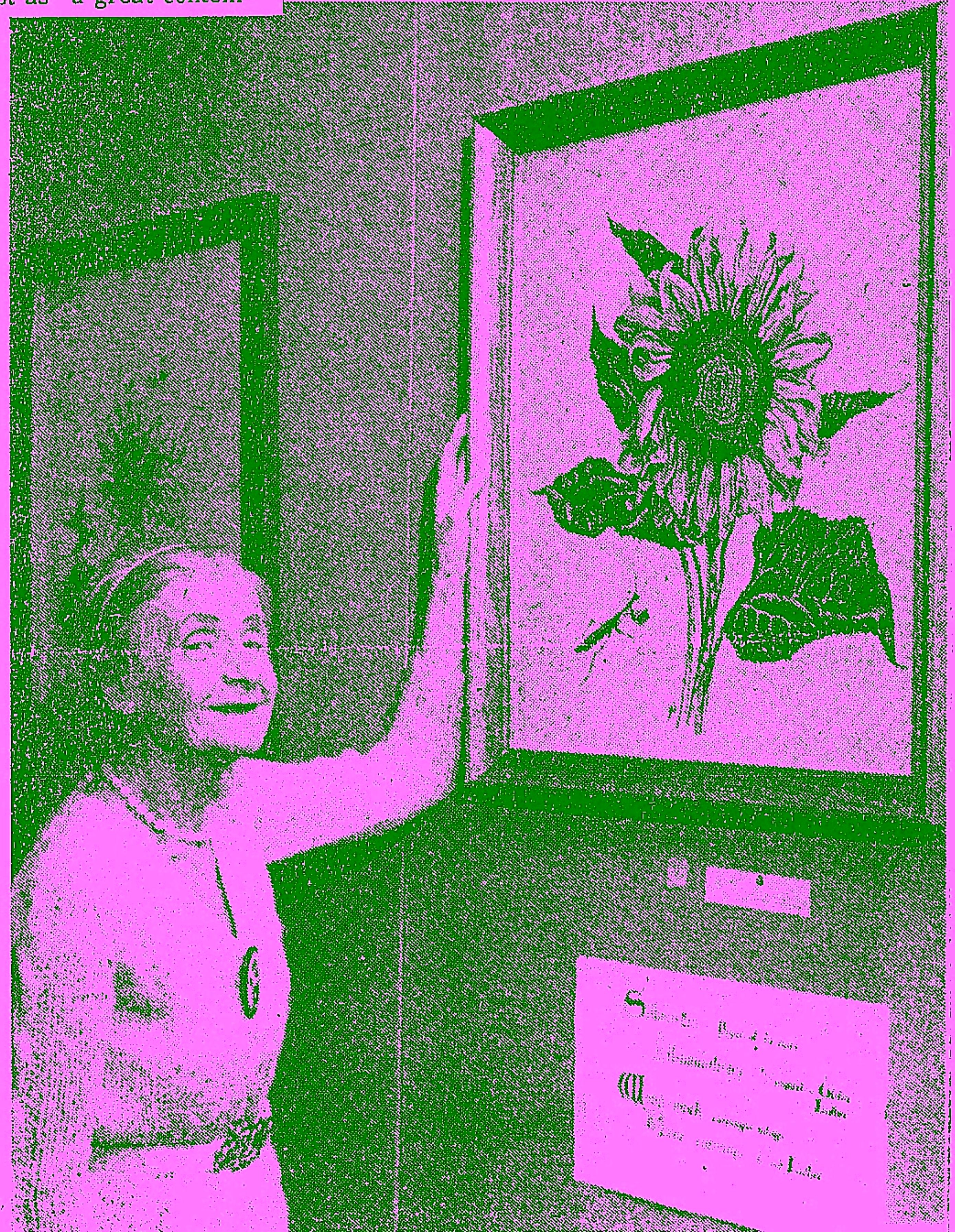
porary master of this difficult scissor art." Her silhouettes are owned by the president of the Hans Christian Anderson Society and also hang in the sing of Denmark's palace as well as in the Franciscan headquarters in Rome, just to name a few places. Her work has also been described in several national magazines and in a book on silhouettes published in 1975 by Peggy Hickman.

Do not pass up the opportunity to meet this

vivacious and interesting lady and to see her beautiful work. Her life and work can probably be best summed up by the opening lines of the Prayer of St. Francis.

"Lord make me the instrument of your peace, where there is hatred, let me sow love"

Mrs. Luther, who enjoys meeting and speaking with people, will be in the Program Room during library hours providing there is no other program scheduled. Library hours



MARGARETHA von Glehn Luther with sample of her art work. (Carmine)