

Works by Florence Riefler Bahr: A Retrospective opens in the Peabody's Galleria Piccola on Monday evening, December 16th, 1996

For sixty-five years Florence E. Riefler Bahr has painted and sketched the world around her, capturing on the pages of her sketchbooks some of the most important events of our time. An exhibition celebrating her life and work will open at the Peabody Institute's Galleria Piccola on December 16th and will continue through January 31st. The retrospective exhibition will include works in a variety of media -- from early portraits to watercolors, collages, watercolors and sketches capturing the participants in the trial of Governor Marvin Mandell, scenes from nature and intimate paintings and drawings of family life in the Bahr home.

In the spring of 1931 Florence walked away from her graduation ceremonies at Maryland Institute College of Art with top honors and an arm full of roses. She grew up in Homeland, the lone pictorial artist in a musical family (her cousin, a young soprano named Mary Walker, studied voice and earned a degree from the Peabody Conservatory and, later, her daughter studied dance at the Preparatory). As her career began to take off, she married portraitist Leonard Bahr, her teacher at the Institute. Passionately in love with each other and their work, they devoted their time almost exclusively to their art. Florence once told a Sun reporter that she and her new husband would "rather paint than eat."

In 1935 Florence was invited to exhibit at the Baltimore Museum of Art. The following year the Maryland Institute hosted a joint show of works by the two Bahrs. Florence was accepted as a member of the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors and one of her oil portraits, "Lily," was exhibited at the Association's annual show in New York. In 1937 Florence won the first of several awards for works exhibited at the Baltimore Museum of Art.

After the birth of her first child, she turned the focus of her attention to her family but continued to paint and sketch the world around her. She painted her three children, her husband, and the family cats. An avid collector, she brought into their home birds' nests, shells, butterfly wings, occasionally putting a dead bird into the refrigerator until she could find the time to do a painting of the tiny corpse.

With two of the children out of the nest and her youngest becoming more independent, Florence returned to Maryland Institute in the 1960s to earn her MFA in painting. It was during this period that she became involved with the civil rights and anti-war movements, campaigning for the end of American involvement in Vietnam. Florence

dream" speech. Maryland State Archives in Annapolis holds a large collection of these remarkable sketchbooks. The agony of the news of the violent death of Dr. King forced Florence back into her studio to create what is undoubtedly the most remarkable work of her career, the powerful *Homage to Martin Luther King*. After the exhibition, which ends on January 31st, 1997, Mr. Kwiese M. Mfume will accept the work on behalf of the NAACP.

The Galleria Piccola is open from Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.