

# Decorative Dames

## Collection of Hord and Schlappi Ornaments

If the name "Florence Hord" sounds only vaguely familiar, it may be because her husband, Donal, was the famous one in the family. While Donal, a sculptor, worked in granite and bronze, Florence made her artistic statements, such as they were, in Styrofoam.

The couple lived on Kendall Street in Pacific Beach. There was a main house, where they frequently entertained, and a studio, where Donal worked until his death in 1966. His multiton pieces were commissioned for public spaces at UCSD, SDSU, the Civic Center, Seaport Village, and Balboa Park. Meanwhile, Florence's Styrofoam creations got hung on the branches of people's Christmas trees.

But, according to Elizabeth

### LOCAL EVENTS

Schlappi, who, along with her mother, was drawn into the Hord orbit in the mid-1950s,

even Donal recognized his wife's "genius."

"Mother once heard Donal say, 'Florence shows more creativity with her ornaments than I do with my sculptures.'"

The Schlappi family became collectors of Hord ornaments, starting in 1959. Mrs. Schlappi was taking sculpture lessons from Donal at the time. On Christmas morning, the younger Schlappi, who was home from college in Ohio, found a box of six Hord ornaments under the tree. "They were the most beautiful things I'd ever seen," she said last week. "I determined then and there to have someday, somehow, a whole tree of Hord ornaments."

The Schlappis' tree was already renowned, at least to their neighbors on Banker's Hill and then South Mission Hills. ("I was born in Mercy Hospital and lived in only two houses my whole life," said Schlappi, who retired from teaching fifth grade for the San Diego public schools in 1994. "I've had the last

four digits of my phone number my whole life, too.") Their ornaments weren't handmade, but they were vintage pieces from the 1930s and 1940s, some made of glass, others of wood, including miniature hobby horses and Santa heads. "We used to have a sign-up sheet for people who wanted to come see the tree; once, there were over 200 names on it."

Hord sold her ornaments through shops in La Jolla and San Francisco, and the Schlappis bought some of her samples. Mostly, though, she just gave them away. And by the mid-1960s, the Schlappis did have a whole treeful of Hords.

As crowds continued to come see the tree, the Schlappis were told that a rotunda would better suit the spectacle. For four years in the 1970s, the tree went up at the rotunda in the San Diego Museum of Art. It was in the Museum of San Diego History for a while after that. For the past 15 years, it has been in the foyer of the Timken Museum of Art.

Hord ornaments range in size from apple equivalents to basketballs. The heaviest ones weigh two and a half pounds, requiring a web of invisible fishing line for strengthening the branches.

Most Hord ornaments are abstract — patterns of beads and sequins, costume pearls and other "jewels," filigree, even fur. "She had the ability to take small elements and make them into a big design," said Schlappi, who claims an ability of her own: "For me, Hord ornaments are like cars. I can say, 'Oh, that must be a '62 or a '63.' The materials got ever more complicated — and expensive. She did make a few with semiprecious stones, although many more only look as if they're made of them."

In the mid-1980s, Hord's health started to fail, and Schlappi began to work as her assistant. When Hord stopped making ornaments, Schlappi started, aided by Hord's critiques and the gift of her mentor's remaining inventory of materials. Schlappi's tend to be representational. "My first one celebrated the pandas — the zoo's first pandas, not the ones we have now. The second one celebrated the *Star of India*, since I'm a crew member."

Now the tree is a Schlappi-Hord collaboration, increasingly reflecting Schlappi's personal interests: "Butterflies, elephants, country music, Egypt. Lots of



Hord ornaments

Egypt — I've been there four times on archaeological travels."

New ones this year include a big (six-inch diameter) chartreuse peacock ornament.

The Schlappis weren't the only San Diego family to become major collectors of ornaments by Hord, who died in 1995 at age 91. The Swartzes of Coronado have a collection, a small part of which can be seen this winter at the Coronado Historical Association's Museum of History and Art.

Ilene Swartz and her husband met the Hords in the 1960s and began being invited to their annual Christmas party. "Every year she made an ornament for each person who came," said Swartz. "Then she started making them for our two daughters' birthdays. That's how we accumulated so many. I found two more boxes in the attic just yesterday, and I've brought them down to the museum."

— Jeanne Schinto

**Annual Holiday Tree  
The Schlappi Collection**

**of Hord and Schlappi Ornaments  
Timken Museum of Art  
Through January 1,  
Tuesday-Saturday,  
10:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.  
Sunday, 1:30-4:30 p.m.  
Closed Monday  
Free  
Info: 619-239-5548 or  
www.timkenmuseum.org**

**"Bejeweled: Ornaments by  
Florence Hord"  
from the Curtis and Ilene Swartz  
Family Collection  
Museum of History and Art  
Coronado Historical Association  
1100 Orange Avenue, Coronado  
Through February 20  
Monday-Friday,  
9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.  
Saturday, 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.  
Sunday, 11:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.  
Donation: \$2-\$4 for adults;  
children under 8, free  
Info: 619-437-8788 or  
www.coronadohistory.org**



**Local Events**  
page 93

**Classical Music**  
page 106

**Art Museums  
& Galleries**  
page 108

**Theater**  
page 110

**Pop Music**  
page 116

**Restaurants**  
page 145

**Movies**  
page 160