

Hollywood Designer Turns To Career in Fine Arts

Carley Craig in sculpture garden which surrounds her home and where the art seems to be appreciated by dogs and cats. In foreground a composition of shining metal, in background a work from a piece of rusted metal



Herald-Examiner photo

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ATLANTA — Back in the 1920s, when Carley Craig's artistic talents first surfaced in Los Angeles, she found it easier to make the front page of the daily newspaper with sketches of Southern California life than to get payment or credit for costumes she designed for film stars like Mae West, Barbara LaMarr, or Aimee Rubin.

"Editors seemed to like my work and I had many generous spreads," Mrs. Craig recalled recently in Atlanta where she is now a sculptress with a growing following. "But I didn't fare well at a film studio where they said my sketches were unacceptable and refused to pay me. The studio used my ideas, however. When the film appeared there were the actors wearing duplicates of my costumes. I went to court and when the judge compared my sketches to still photos from the film, he ordered the studio to pay me."

That was not the end of the artist's battle for honest credit. Another studio hired her as a designer and paid her well, but kept her hidden from stars, publicists and press. Her designs were credited to a big-name designer who seemed to have lost her touch.

"But eventually I had the opportunity to work with Edith Head," Mrs. Craig said, "and that was a reward-

ing experience. Edith is so talented and so thoroughly professional in all respects. Today when I have an exhibition in Atlanta, or wherever, I always send Edith an invitation."

A pause in Mrs. Craig's career when she married Lockheed engineer James Craig and had two children (a son who graduated from MIT and is now a member of Stanford University's brain trust, and a daughter who graduated from Georgia Tech and now is an engineer in Wyoming didn't hamper her creative growth, but sent her in new directions.

"We moved to Marietta (Ga.) and as soon as my children were in school, I went back to school to study fine art. There was no film industry in Georgia where my costume designs were required, so I moved into fine art."

At first Mrs. Craig painted, eventually her paintings turned into collages, then the collages got thicker and thicker.

"They were so thick," Mrs. Craig said with a laugh, pointing to a work on her living room wall, "that pieces kept falling off. I had to use big stove bolts to hold some of the works together. Finally I left collage for sculpture. And I went back to school to learn how to work with metal."

Carley Craig didn't confine her study to work with copper and steel. She enrolled in a ballet class and eventually

Her ballet resulted in one of the most innovative applications of her work.

A contemporary dance group asked her to create a sculpture around which a choreograph could be written.

"I made metal masques which the dancers could hold in their teeth so the art didn't interfere with their bodies," Mrs. Craig explains. "The dancers even beat on the sculpture during portions of the dance."

Working as a sculptor in heavy metal is much harder in Atlanta than in Los Angeles or Manhattan or Chicago where foundries are in abundance and the cost of metals is not exorbitant.

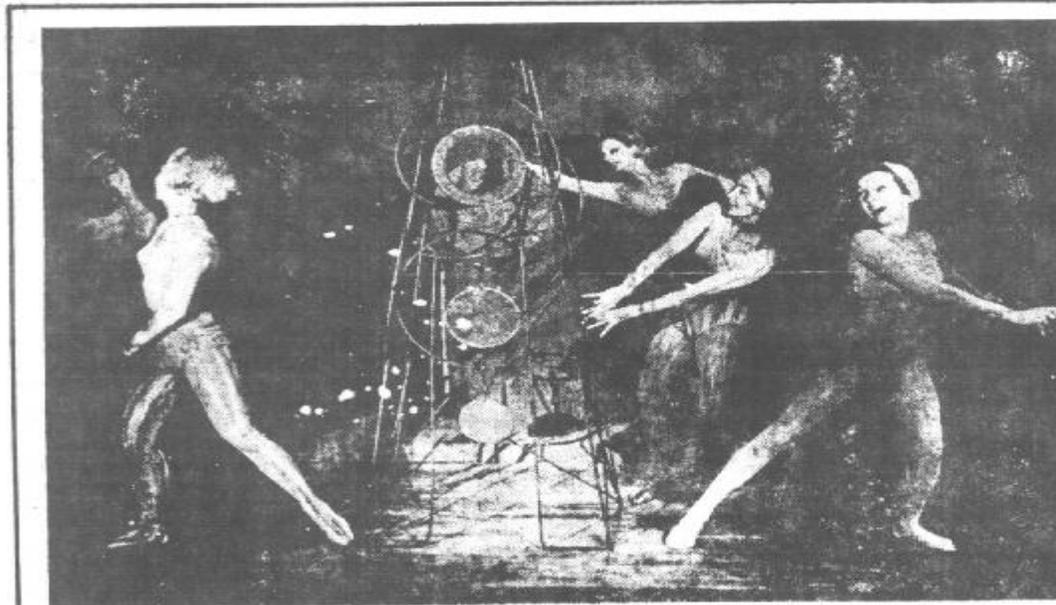
"I have to depend almost entirely on found materials," Mrs. Craig explains. "I was working almost entirely in rusted metals. Then a builder commissioned a work, but asked me to do it in shiny metal."

It seems fitting that an artist who began her career on the front page of a metropolitan newspaper should have created two of her most unique pieces from metal castings she found in the mechanical rooms of the Atlanta Journal and Constitution newspapers.

Carley Craig works at home and the gardens which surround her modest hillside manor house have become a virtual sculpture garden, filled as they are with an assortment of her works. An assortment of pets — hers and the neighbors — also roam Mrs. Craig's garden, and nothing delights the artist more than the sight of one of her cats sitting on a work, or one of her dogs rubbing his head or back on one of her steel constructions.

But the greatest pleasure of all for the sculptress is to see happy smiles light the faces of guests who approach her front door when they see two of her works, "The Lovers" and "Touch Therapy."

Even the ivy seems to crawl up them lovingly.



The Atlanta Experimental Dance Group performs around a Carley Craig sculpture. In the dance sequence, dancers bang on work, later wear metal masques and, still later, portions of the sculpture are removed so that dancers may perform in them.