

Philadelphia Inquirer
January 4, 1996

Family and womanhood reflected in artist's work

Paula Mandel's work is on display at Germantown Academy.

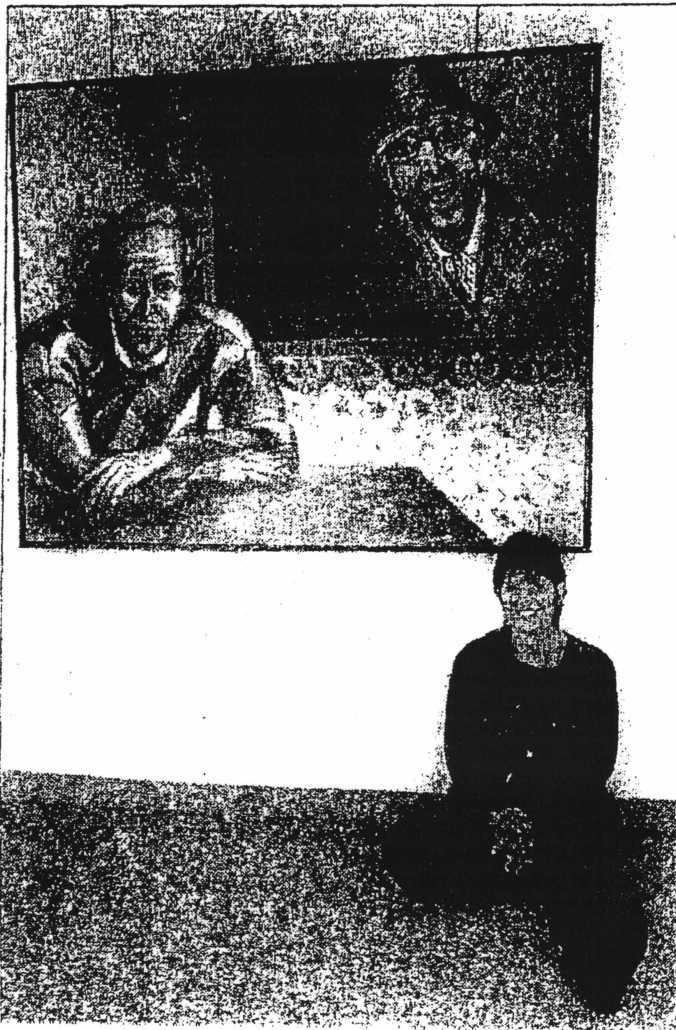
By Pheralyn Dove
INQUIRER CORRESPONDENT

FORT WASHINGTON — Like her paintings, Paula Mandel is animated, colorful, expressive. On a recent day, for instance, her clothing was a blend of wearable art that transformed Mandel into a walking palette of purple, fuchsia and mauve.

Even her conversation about her life as a professional psychologist-turned-artist, wife and mother seemed filled with excitement, passion and sensitivity.

All Mandel's worlds converge on her vibrant, richly textured canvases in a surrealistic fashion. Her oversize oil paintings and mixed-media pieces, currently on view at Germantown Academy's Arts Center, give the viewer a sense of dream sequences and fantasy. Portraiture is a dominant factor, and an emphasis on family and womanhood is also apparent.

Mandel, who lives in White-marsh, has contributed 14 pieces to the juried exhibition,



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"Paula Mandel's work is very interesting because it shows the evolutionary process of a woman with a family. She sorts out roles and relationships that represent the different stages that a woman goes through. That's why I relate to the work," said Joan Harrington, director of the arts center's gallery and a primary-school art teacher at Germantown Academy.

Harrington said the school's art faculty oversaw the selection process at the gallery, which annually presents five professional shows, three student shows and a faculty art show. After a review of slides of the submissions, there is a vote. Harrington said Mandel's selection was a unanimous decision by the art faculty's six members.

"These pieces show that I think life is a balance," Mandel said. "I consciously spend a lot of time and energy trying to make things flow together. But I try not to get obsessed with any one thing, although I give my all to whatever it is I'm involved in at the time, whether it's my art, or my children or my husband.

"My art is much stronger now because I'm a mother and a wife than it was when I was a younger adult," said Mandel, 42.

Originally from the Mount Airy section of Philadelphia, Mandel graduated with a double degree in psychology and fine arts from Temple University and spent a semester abroad studying in Rome under the auspices of Temple University's Tyler School of Art. As a psychologist, she worked pri-

Paula Mandel poses with "A Wrinkle in Time." Her artwork shows "that I think life is a balance," she says.

marily as a play therapist.

Four years ago, Mandel, a founding member of the Artforms Gallery in Manayunk, became a full-time artist. Since that time, her work has appeared in juried exhibitions at the Woodmere Art Museum in Chestnut Hill, at the Paley Design Center at the Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science, and at the Carol Schwartz Gallery in Chestnut Hill. Mandel said the Germantown Academy exhibition was particularly special because her two teenagers — Lauren, 13, and Michael, 14, were students there.

Though most of Mandel's pieces in the show are huge oil paintings, there are some smaller offerings, such as a series of three mixed works. *Looking Forward, Dancing Personae* and *Who Am I With When I'm Alone?* are studies in a woman's duality. Each painting combines a black-and-white graphite and charcoal realistic figure juxtaposed against a colorful masklike surrealistic representation of a person done in watercolor, pencil, color pencil and pastel.

"These paintings," Mandel said, "are an examination of the internal versus the external self and how we put on exterior characteristics for our public world and save certain other characteristics for our inner worlds. And often, these worlds are quite different."

One of her larger oil paint-

ings, *Cantata*, an oil on linen, represents the next progressive step from the series of the three smaller works, said Mandel, who typically spends three or four months on each large canvas. *Cantata* portrays a woman sitting at a mirror with three different heads that symbolically represent three sides of her personality. Consistent with Mandel's style, the painting is a lively blend of bright, neon colors with overlapping glazes and rich textures and designs.

Other works in the show portray Mandel's relationship to her children and her husband. A number of them demonstrate her devotion to her extended family, as evidenced in the painting *Four Generations*, a realistic depiction of her daughter and her grandmother.

"I really love having people in each of my paintings," Mandel said. "That's where my nurturance comes from — from talking and relating to people."

If You Go

Where: Germantown Academy, Lafayette Avenue and Morris Road, Fort Washington.

When: Mondays through Fridays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. To Jan. 30. Opening reception is 3 to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Cost: Free.

Phone: 215-646-3300.