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THESE FIVE OLDER ARTISTS HAVE MORE TO OFFER TODAY THAN EVER — AND THEY'RE DETERMINED TO **NOT FADE AWAY**

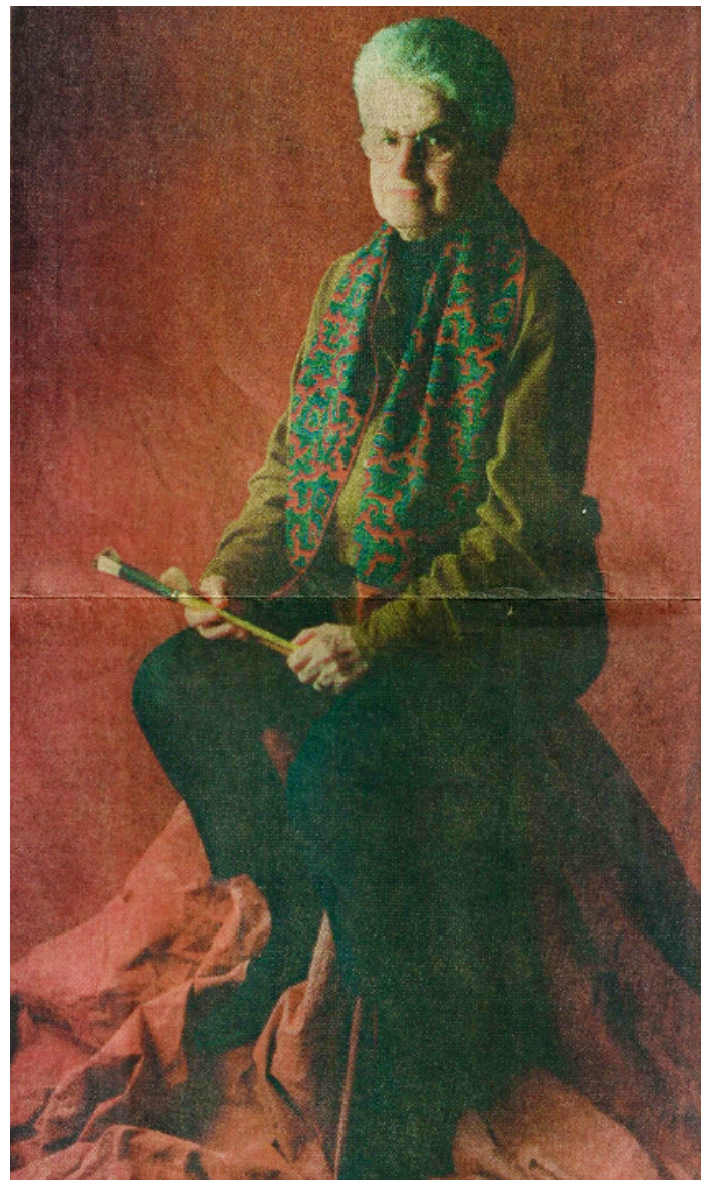
By LLYOD SACHS
ENTERTAINMENT CRITIC

Having thrived in their respective fields for upward of 40 years, they certainly have a full share of stories to tell. Visual artist Evelyn Statsinger recalled the time she accepted an invitation to meet the great Mexican artist Diego Rivera and see his collection of pre-Columbian art-but turned down an invitation to meet his wife, unimpressed by her "also" being an artist. The woman, not yet famous, was Frida Kahlo.

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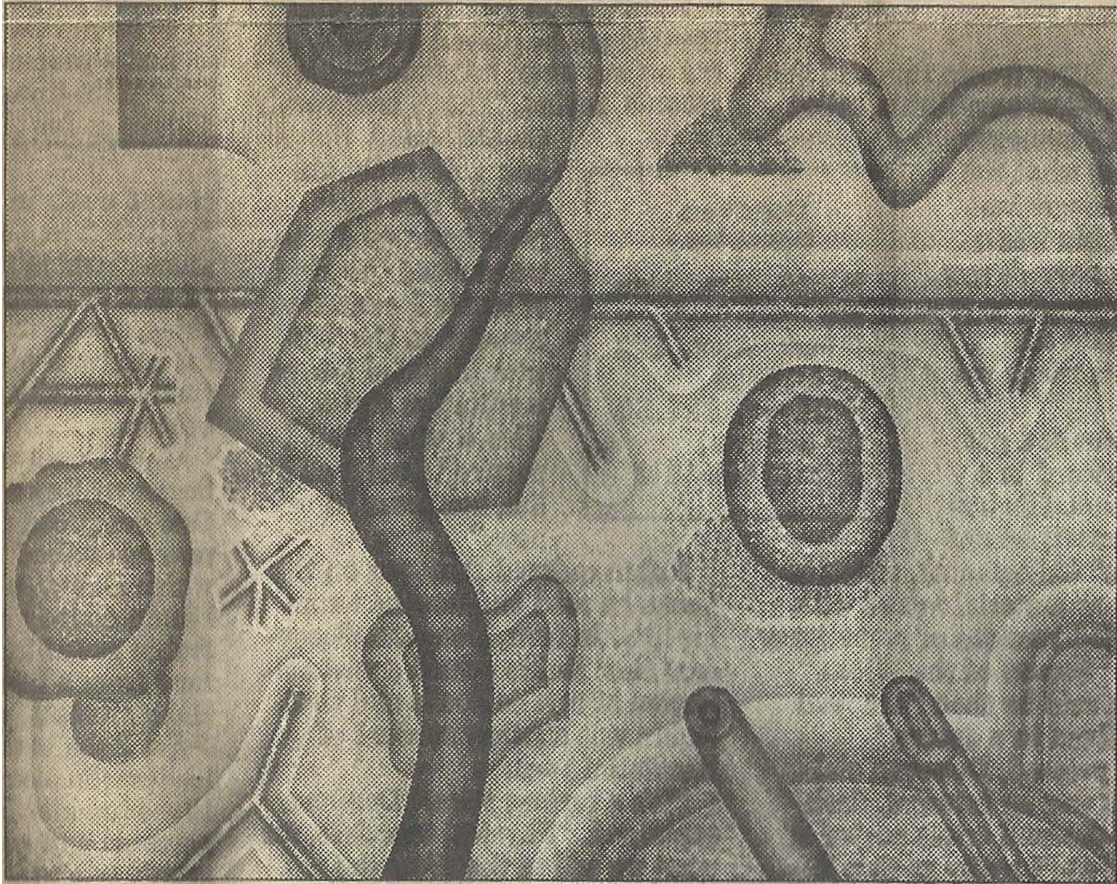
Evelyn Statsinger, art

Visual artist Evelyn Statsinger approaches her 70th birthday in June with no more attention to membership in the Big 7-0 club than any other. "I don't feel like an old person. I never thought of myself as part of any particular group," she said, shrugging off as "meaningless" the labels her meticulously detailed, boldly imagined works have drawn.



Tags such as "imagist," "organic abstractionist" and "monster school" may be convenient for curators and critics. But to her, they feed false assumptions that the artistic impulse behind her works-and the experience of viewing them-remains consistent.

"I don't work from drawings, so I never know where something is going," she said. In the catalog for "Women and Chicago Imagism," a show now up at the State of Illinois Building that includes her paintings, she likens the artistic process to "a spider weaving a web ... something natural and instinctive."



Evelyn Statsinger's painting "Flood Tide" (1993).

She also has thrived on not knowing where she is going in a larger sense. Since making a name for herself in the late '40s with edgy, "psychologically resonant" (her term) ink drawings filled with odd shapes and symbols, she has repeatedly altered her style, tone, direction and form. She also is acclaimed for her Xerox collages, sculpture and prints.

A native of Brooklyn, N. Y., Statsinger was shaped from birth by unusual circumstances. She lived the first three years of her life, following her mother's death, with a Trinidadian nurse and her family. After

moving to the Windy City in 1947 to study at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she intensified her involvement in other cultures. She lived in various locations in Mexico and, later, in Japan.

Many of her paintings reflect a delight in gazing at natural wonders ranging from lush Mexican landscapes (which first inspired her to work in color) and the pine needles near her Michigan summer home. Organic shapes dominate her recent large-scale works, not only with their heated colors and cool underlying mysteries but also their odd sexual — or perhaps asexual — tension.

She also has been inspired by music (including classical and Indian ragas) and literature ("In the Penal Colony," an early work chosen for the Museum of Contemporary Art's current overview of Chicago art, was based on the Franz Kafka story).

If anything, the dialogues she pursues between her outer and inner worlds are marked by a greater intensity now. "I want my work to become deeper," she said. "But as I've gotten older, I've become more open to different experiences, and I want it to be more open and freer as well. Age makes you available to a kind of freedom you don't have access to earlier on."

Aging has taken one toll. The 5-foot tall Statsinger has more trouble lifting her sizable canvases. But, she said jokingly, "I'm not a member of the vertically challenged club, either." It takes more than diminutiveness to slow a free spirit.