

Redding woman brightens town hall with recycled art

Sandra Diamond Fox April 10, 2018



When walking into the Redding Town Hall conference room recently, many may have noticed the nearly two dozen three-dimensional framed pieces of art lining all the walls.

The display, called *Homage to the Collage*, is the work of Redding resident Alice Smith, executive assistant to First Selectman Julia Pemberton.

Smith's work will be on exhibit through the end of spring.

Each of the 21 pieces of art at Town Hall — one of which is on the table in the front hall — is made

from paper that Smith bends and cuts through origami. She then glues each layer together.

The result is thousands of pieces, in multiple layers, of many different colors, shapes and patterns. Most of her pieces are of flowers.

“It can be a single layer of one flower or a flower in layers of 10,” said Smith, 55, who has been making collages since 2015. “For my largest pieces I have thousands of flowers, and I bend them and scrunch them to give them a sculptural feel on the flat surface.”

Many of her pieces are based on triptych, three-paneled pieces that are connected.

When creating each piece, Smith looks through magazines such as Martha Stewart Living and Architectural Digest. She also uses old calendars and catalogues.

“I use any publication that has good color and patterns,” said Smith, who works out of a gallery in her home.

If she can't find the particular color she's looking for, she said, “I wait and rethink the piece, or redo it and maybe come up with a new solution.”

For each piece of art, she also creates a 6-foot by 8-foot frame.

She works with paper to pay homage “to the dying of the printed page,” she said, adding, “So many magazines and publications are going digital.”

Child artist

Growing up in Buffalo, N.Y., Smith said, she was referred to as the family artist.

“I was always doing a project, whether it was building an ant farm, collecting butterflies, planting a garden, painting, or sewing,” she said.

At school, she said, she was always creating and would go above and beyond what was required. “If the teacher asked the kids to make a drawing, I would do a mural.”

It wasn't long before her teachers acknowledged her talent. “I was lucky enough to be called out and engage privately with my artist teachers, and they would take a liking to me,” she said. “I would ask them lots of questions, and always asked for more work.”

Her teachers encouraged her to apply for a full art scholarship to a small, all-female, progressive high school called the Buffalo Seminary. She took their advice and got accepted.

During her years at the seminary, she spent a lot of time in the art room working under well-known artist Jean Henrich, who had studied with famous painter and artist Charles Ephraim Burchfield.

After high school, Smith attended Vassar College, where she received a bachelor of arts degree in history. She then worked as a graphic designer, an art director and a graphic artist.

Smith sold her first piece of art, called Stream Reimagine, at Mark Twain Library's art show in December 2017. Other pieces have been auctioned for charities and such nonprofit organizations as New Pond Farm.

Therapeutic

Smith works on her art in the evenings and on weekends.

"It's therapeutic. I'm a very type A person," said Smith, who moved to Redding in 1990. She has two grown sons with her husband, Steve. "This winds me down — it's putting organization to chaos."

Friends collect magazines and catalogs and put them aside for her. "I have drawers and drawers of pieces of cutouts in my craft room," she said.

When looking for ideas for new pieces, with each new page she turns to, "instead of seeing a bunch of random objects, I see opportunities," Smith said. "It is the layout and choice of colors and patterns that I see in the flow of the pages or graphics in every magazine."

She said her work reflects her intention to recognize all the designers and artists who provide the content for her art.

"I simply want to use their inspiration in a different way — all cut up and reassembled."

For more information on Smith's art, visit alicesmithart.com.