

PIECE TALKS

JANIS GIBSON MARCH 8, 2017
DECORATING & DESIGNHOME FEATURES



Redding collage artist Alice Smith, who works with recycled materials, stands in front of her three-dimensional work, Kaleidoscope of Color: 'Field of Flowers,' Bryan Haeffele photo

Visitors to the Smith home in Redding are drawn to take a closer look at the colorful, shiny, and three-dimensional artworks that line a couple of wide hallway walls. Facial expressions tend to go from quizzical to smiles as viewers recognize that the shapes are created by carefully arranged folded paper flowers, cut spirals or other shapes. A glance at tabletops also reveals individual folded flowers on “stems” in vases.

Once it is learned that Alice Smith created the artwork, the questions begin.

The idea was sparked, she explains, while assisting a class for children at Grace Farms in New Canaan that featured an origami specialist. With some time left after the crafts were completed, she looked at the paper scraps left over and said to the children, “Let’s see what we can do with these.” Their creativity, she says, “inspired me to look at scraps and color differently.”



*Spouted Rainbow. Cut paper on canvas.
Alice Smith photo*

'I just loved all the colors together, as if they are spouting off the canvas, in rainbow colors,' Alice says.—

It also meshed with a passion of hers: reuse and recycling. Like many couples whose now-adult children are pretty well launched, the Smiths are looking at "living smaller" in the future, and Alice has been culling and finding new uses or homes for things for some time. But shelves of lifestyle magazines she had collected had her stumped, other than taking them over to the Redding recycling center. Inspired, she now found a new use for them.

"I started flipping through magazines looking for patterns in the pictures, things that could be shaped into flowers, and it just flowed," she recounts. "I like the lightness of magazine paper — the flowers move as you pass by — and found the work calming, easy to focus on. And flowers are beautiful — who doesn't love flowers?" The size of the pattern cut from a page also helps

to dictate the size of the flower, which varies from about three to eight inches in diameter.

While most of the flower pictures are in the 16-by-20 or 18-by-24-inch range, Alice decided to create a massive piece — six by eight feet — to go on the upper wall of a two-story side entry. She wanted to create a color-wheel effect using seasonal colors, noting, "I like annuals, the less permanent aspect of them," and created batches of them. Assembly took more planning.

A part-time personal trainer with a large home gym, she decided to take advantage of a week off between clients and use the gym floor to stage and assemble — once she had created a frame of light wood and screen. Alice explains, "I built the frame, then backed it with a double layer of fiberglass screen that had been left over from a project called Rewired that another artist did with teens at the old Gilbert & Bennett factory in Georgetown a couple of years ago," (An aside, Gilbert & Bennett invented metal window screens in 1861.)

Evenings after work were spent casually tossing the flowers into place, filling the frame, doing light rearranging, then gluing them into place.

After working with the flowers, Alice began experimenting with other shapes and materials, creating a triptych of 20-by-16-inch foamcore boards on which various colored spirals were arranged and varnished. "That was a tribute to my high school mentor, who studied with Charles Burchfield," Alice states. "I was afraid of color for so long, but I liked the discipline of arranging the colors; it forces you to make decisions. I think these projects are leading me back to painting, which I haven't done in a long time."

Alice studied art history in college and worked as a graphic designer for a number of years, as well as an art director for magazines. “That was part of what makes it so hard for me to get rid of old magazines; I know all the work that goes into creating what appears on the pages.”

She also cuts geometric shapes and incorporates items from around the house, such as ripped T-shirts, pieces of jute, a bag of rhinestones, and shells collected on a beach, to give texture to her collages. She notes that each item brings up memories, and she is pleased to give new life to things that might otherwise have been discarded, adding, “Making something beautiful out of refuse gives me pleasure and hopefully gives pleasure to the viewer.”

Alice Smith may be contacted at askalicesmith@gmail.com or 203-470-6694.



‘Draping Duchamp.’ Affixed, stiffened and painted fabric and paper on canvas. ‘This reminds me of Duchamp’s Nude Descending a Staircase,’ Smith notes. — Alice Smith photo



“Field of Flowers” — Alice Smith photo