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Carol Rhodes-Wittich

Textile Art Extraordinaire

BY TANYA ROSCORLA



If you want to work with someone who cares about your artwork, Carole Rhodes-Wittich is the woman to see. Artists seek Rhodes-Wittich to create new ways do display their artwork. She takes the time to figure out what artists want to accomplish and comes up with ideas to print their work on silk. She runs a digital silk printing business from her location in Fair Oaks.

Owner of Cje's Art & Fiber Printing, Rhodes-Wittich will share what she can do for artists with the Folsom Arts Association at their meeting this month. She specializes in printing on silk, but can print on just about anything, including glass and tile. Artists can use their work on pillows, scarves, T-shirts, canvas and other material. Her work is an art form all in itself. She uses creativity and her expertise to produce quality art piece replicas in which canvas is not the only medium.

"In this day and age I spend a lot of time trying to help artists understand how to use their [own] art so they can make it more viable in the marketplace," Rhodes-Wittich says. "She supports artists and completes projects as quickly as she can," says Lori Anderson, the vice president of the Folsom Arts Association. Anderson has been taking photos of her paintings to Rhodes-Wittich for three years to have them turned into greeting cards or giccles (pictures of a painting that are printed on canvas). "She enjoys what she's doing so much," Anderson says, "she really gets into it and she likes to figure things out and get creative."

Rhodes-Wittich started her business seven years ago without any training, but with plenty of experience from her previous work with glass and textiles. She took classes to improve her skills in those areas at American River College, the Mendocino Art Center and the Academy of Art University in San Francisco.

“I’ve always been a textiles person,” Rhodes-Wittich says. “I just like the feel of the fabric.”

She bought printing machinery and learned everything from a few technicians who knew how to operate it. Several years later, after much practice, she has become comfortable with the printing process, though she calls technicians in when something goes wrong. Silk can become damaged at any point in the printing process. After the paper-backed silk is printed, Rhodes-Wittich takes the paper off. Then she places the silk into a commercial steamer, runs it through the laundry and irons it wet. The process is not easy, but the silk turns out beautiful when done right.

“Silk is pretty sturdy,” she says, “and a lot of people think it’s very delicate; it just looks delicate.”

Rhodes-Wittich has printed fellow artist Susan Cawthon’s watercolor paintings on silk so that Cawthon can make pillows and other pieces from them. Cawthon started taking her work to Rhodes-Wittich about a year after she began painting and says that Rhodes-Wittich often spends hours helping her figure out what she should do with her artwork.

Rhodes-Wittich is so involved in the creative process of the pieces she prints that the final work of art is a result of committed collaboration.