

Joanne Gold



Joanne Gold intends to jazz up the floors and tables of Co-op customers with her one of a kind painted canvases in bold designs and colors. Drop a spot of color by your sink, and drop a spot for Spot, too, while you're at it — Joanne makes special, super heavy-duty, decorated mats for canine companions, too.

I toured the large, open basement studio at her home in Florence for this interview. Joanne had a half dozen mats she was coating with a protective finish on big wooden work tables. At another table, layers of fabric scraps made a colorful kaleidoscope. She turned over the floor mats to show off a neatly mitered and glued seam. Joanne used to hem the edges of the mats, but now she has perfected a gluing method which results in a flatter corner than the sewn, and is easier on her hands. On the pet mats, which are made of a #4 heavy duty canvas, she paints both sides instead of turning under and

gluing, due to the extreme thickness of the material.



But before anything gets hemmed, there is a labor intensive process to go through. Raw canvas is unrolled, measured and cut with shrinkage in mind, and then soaked in very hot water in her tub. She'll then dry it on plastic, and iron the wrinkles out before doing final measuring and cutting prior to edge finishing. Every step of the process has been developed in ways that accommodate the rheumatoid arthritis in her hands. "I am constantly thinking of ways that I can keep doing this work, like trying to squeeze glue out of the bottle," explained Joanne. "I can't, so I pour it into a tray and use a palette knife to spread it...I just need to find these go-arounds."

The canvas is sealed with Kilz primer before she works with her colors of acrylic paint. She'll lay down a base color and work washes over sections, and she has several methods she uses to decorate them. Freehand brush-work, of course, but also she cuts her own stamps out of art foam. Mounted on pieces of wood, they are easy to grip and use. She also designs and cuts her own stencils. A large fish stencil was used on the pieces that were being coated.



More recently she has been using strips of treated fabric as part of the design. In order to stiffen the fabric and make sure it is protected, she gives it several coats of ModgePodge and then presses it between

parchment paper. “I use the fabric shapes and play with them when they are dry; it is really hours in composing. Often I will start with an idea, and change a bit between mats, sort of working in pairs.”

It is very laborious to prepare her pieces, but when it comes time to paint a batch of mats and table runners, Joanne loves to get in the flow of the creative process. “Often I will start with an idea, and change a bit between mats, sort of working in pairs, and evolving them. I find that once I get in a groove, it just starts flowing and ideas come in and it just starts opening up like that...and for me, there is nothing like that flow.”

Joanne’s artistic journey began in college, but “I was too hotheaded and dropped out after two years and said, ok, I’ve learned everything now, I just want to do it.” She moved out to Sante Fe New Mexico at 19 or 20 years old and found a pottery cooperative. They were all older and more experienced, but they let her join in return for teaching classes to students at the school it was attached to. “I got into teaching., taught for kids, then started doing adult classes. Then I started having problems — physical symptoms of pain, in my elbows especially, and it was so hard to give it up. I was 27.”

She came back east and went to school for dental hygiene, figuring it was a field where she could earn good money part time and still do some art. “Which was a poor choice, but I didn’t know what was going on with my symptoms.” The repetitive motions involved with dental hygiene care took their toll and instead of part time work, Joanne got involved with a full time career and family.

“I kind of feel like the creative outlet while I was a dental hygienist was raising my daughter in a humane, holistic way. Early on when she was a baby and toddler, I felt like I was getting swallowed up in motherhood and wondered how I would ever have a creative life again. Then a wise friend said to me, You’ve got a kid, it’s like the most creative project ever, raising a child!”

These occupations lasted for 25 years, but her hands eventually were a mess and she quit, finding work as an ESL teacher with adults in Holyoke instead.

That’s when she started taking classes at the Hill Institute in decorative floor cloths. The Florence school is “a great adult art ed setup— this millionaire funded the school in perpetuity to be used this way, and so it costs maybe 50 dollars to take a ten week class with an artist!”



Here she is, working in her own “sheltered workshop” as she jokingly calls it. Joanne has been a Co-op member since November 2015 and finds it fun working at the store and being part of the group. Learning the cash register and other things was very new to her but thanks to the good instructions and emergency help from Cheryl, she’s become confident behind the counter. Welcome, Joanne Gold!

Joanne's website: www.steponitfloormats.com