

Stone paintings “rock” Claremont artist’s world

Art is a very heavy subject for Claremont painter Dawn Grimes. Ms. Grimes’ passion is painting houses and buildings, using large rocks as a canvas.

Fifteen of these rock paintings are on display at the Claremont Community Foundation through February 28. The exhibit showcases Ms. Grimes’ depictions of businesses, public buildings and residences, most of which are located in Claremont. Among the brightly rendered edifices are Sumner Elementary School, Claremont’s historic train depot, the Claremont Police Department and several village stores.

“About 5 years ago, I started with an idea,” Ms. Grimes recalls. “This one stone I saw looked like a church to me and it was really a revelation, because architecture is my passion and my hobby.”

Ms. Grimes painted her church and, happy with the outcome, went on to paint 20 more buildings—all of them nonexistent homes and churches that she envisioned in her mind. She brought these paintings to the annual Village Venture Arts and Crafts Faire and was amazed to see them sell out in a matter of minutes.

“One lady bought like 10,” Ms. Grimes marveled. “I went home and told my husband, ‘I’ve got something here.’ People started calling me up and saying, ‘Will you paint my house?’”

So Ms. Grimes moved from the realm of the imaginary to the world of the homes and buildings that are dear to her clients. Capturing a building’s likeness and character is a responsibility she takes as seriously as any portrait artist.

She begins with an interview session.

“Talking is an important step,” Ms. Grimes said. “People tell me about their families, when they started their business. They share those things and then it’s almost like a psychic connection I start to get with the folks.

“I start to feel what to emphasize,” she continued. “People tell me, ‘I can’t believe you put that vase in the window—that’s my favorite vase.’”

And the painter says the charm and uniqueness of a building lies in the details. Ms. Grimes strives to put bits of her client’s lives into her renderings, from a coiled gar-

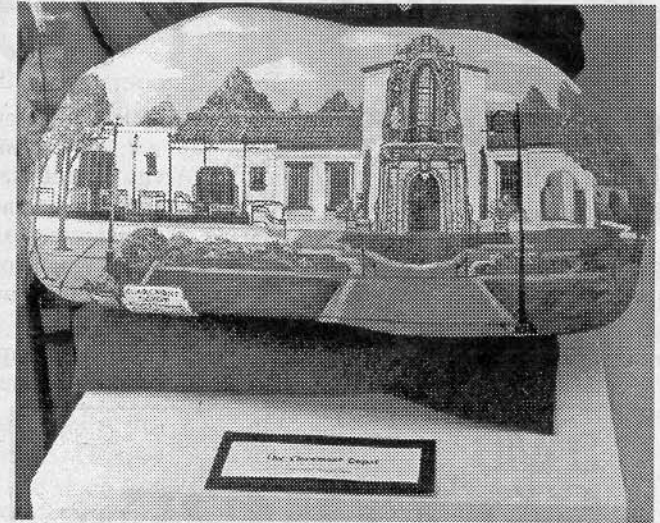


COURIER photo/Trish Branley
Dawn Grimes with her rock painting of Sumner Elementary School.

den hose to the cat sunning itself on a porch.

But before she gets to that point, she must first select the perfect rock. She chooses hefty stones, usually of a weight that takes both hands to carry. It can take Ms. Grimes about a week to find a stone shaped perfectly for the project at hand. Finding a stone long enough for the Depot “took forever”, she remembers.

Once the rock is selected, she fills in any holes or irregularities with a hard resin; she is then ready to begin painting from the portfolio of photographs she



COURIER photo/Trish Branley
A rock painting of the Depot

takes of each edifice. She uses water-based acrylic paint, then seals the rock so that it may be displayed indoors or out.

When the painting is done, usually within a month, Ms. Grimes likes to hold a little ceremony as she presents the finished product to her clients.

“I cover it with a silk cover and I lift it up,” she says. “I have had people cry, people run around the room and jump up and own. One man had tears running down his face. He was moving and he said, ‘You captured my home.’”

It is not uncommon for Ms. Grimes to be commissioned because homeowners are leaving behind a place where they have forged a lifetime of memories. Other times, people simply want an heirloom-quality record of the place they call home, something they can hand down to their children.

“Some people, they just feel special about where they live,” the artist said

And Ms. Grimes feels privileged when people are willing to put something that special in her hands.

“These wouldn’t mean as much to me if I couldn’t share them,” she said, gesturing to the rocks placed on

ROCK

Continued from page 9

pedestals throughout the Claremont Community Foundation. Most of them are commissioned stones that she borrowed back from clients just for the exhibit.

"These are almost like kids to me," she said. "When I see them again, I get excited. I'll go to pick them up and there's the rock sitting in a prominent place on someone's bookshelf, or in their lovely living room."

One rock painting in the exhibit that was not commissioned is Ms. Grimes' rendering of the Depot. The stone was quickly snapped up by Sonja and Bob Stump; he was drawn to the painting because his family helped build the landmark.

This painting is the first in a series Ms. Grimes plans to make of Southern California train stations. Also in the works is a series of historic landmarks

along Route 66.

"I could never have enough time to paint everything I love to paint," Ms. Grimes said.

And though—like any artist—she has experimented with many genres, from doll-making to jewelry, what Ms. Grimes loves to paint are buildings on stone.

"Nothing really grabbed me like this," she said. "This fulfills all the things within myself I want to express, and I meet so many great people."

"I want to keep going for as long as possible," she continued. "I've found my niche and my passion in this."

Ms. Grimes charges an average of \$400 for a stone rendering of the front and back of a home, \$300 for one side.

Those interested in commissioning a stone "portrait" of their home or business may call her at 624-7925.

The Claremont Community Foundation is located at 205 Yale Avenue.

Information: 398-1060.

—Sarah Torribio-Bond