

Senior spotlight Dawn Grimes Myers, CLAREMONT ARTIST

Preserving architectural history one stone at a time

By Donna R. Phillips

Her business card says it well, "Dawn Grimes Myers, Artist, Capturing Architectural History on Stone." Ms. Myers paints the likenesses of houses, historic buildings and sometimes abandoned structures on a most interesting surface—stone. A local artist, Ms. Myers has completed dozens of commissions both locally and nationally, and her work has become quite well known in Claremont. This year, she left her day job and is now working as a fulltime artist.

Born in Queens, New York in 1950, her family relocated to Michigan and then moved to the Washington Adams area of Los Angeles when Ms. Myers was just 8 years-old. The family then moved to the Windsor Square area of Los Angeles, which is adjacent to Hancock Park. As a child, she was entranced with the eclectic mix of architecture that dotted the neighborhoods of Los Angeles, and often took long walks to study the interesting houses in her area. It's no wonder that years later, her major at UCLA was art and architecture.

Ms. Myers has always been an artist and crafter. During her college days, she made jewelry and also designed and made clothing for fellow students. After college, she designed a line of international dolls which were sold by Nordstrom's. Though Ms. Myers didn't become an architect, she has always had a passion for it. Her favorite time periods are 1880-1930 with a concentration on the Mid-Century Modern era.

"We are so blessed in California to have so much interesting architecture so close together," she said.

After her divorce 24 years ago, Ms. Myers came to Claremont to stay with her sister. She felt an affinity for the neighborhood and decided to raise her infant daughter, Camille, in the area. She worked in the banking industry for a number of years and in 1996 became head of student accounts for the Claremont Community School of Music. In 1997, she married Michael Myers who is a local massage therapist and owns Balanced Therapies in Claremont.

In 2001, she started a new position as head of student accounts at the Claremont Colleges Student Health Services Center. Even though she worked fulltime for many years, Ms. Myers is a dedicated artist and continued creating artwork in her free time.

"It was difficult, but sometimes I stayed up all night just to finish a commission," she said.

Her venture into painting on stone started about 8 years ago. While walking, she found a small stone that was shaped like a church with a steeple. She painted a church on it and was pleased with the result. She then gathered more small stones and painted pictures of homes she created from her fertile imagination. All of these stones sold quickly. Shortly after this, her friend Steve asked if she would paint a picture of his parent's home in Pennsylvania on a large stone, and her new career was born.

"I knew it was right when I started it and I've just gone with the flow," she said.

Since then, Ms. Myers has completed commissions for



COURIER photo/Jenelle Rensch

Dawn Grimes Myers - "It's not how big or small your house is, but what it means to you."

many distinguished clients. She is especially proud of her 2006 commission for the outgoing President of Harvey Mudd College Jon C. Strauss. The college commissioned her to paint a front and back view of the college on opposing sides of a stone. Mr. Strauss has the artwork in a place of honor in his home in Bainbridge Island, Washington. Another commission, of which she is especially proud, is the former Baxter Student Health Building at the Claremont Colleges. She painted the front and back of the building on a stone before the structure was torn down and rebuilt. Her artwork is on permanent display inside the new Robert E. Tranquada Student Services Center as an architectural history of the Baxter structure.

Once Ms. Myers accepts a commission, she takes detailed pictures of the house. She also arranges a walk through to understand the inside of the structure. The owners give her a history of their house as well as a feel for their personalities. Some customers have asked for their animals to be shown on the front lawn, others ask her to include toys or bicycles in the artwork. Ms. Myers takes all of this knowledge with her when selecting just the right stone to use for the painting. She uses local river rock purchased from quarries in the area.

"Each rock must fit the house, not only in size, but in essence. It must evoke how the house fits on the land," she explained.

Next, she prepares the surface of the rock for painting using a special compound to smooth out the indentations. She lets it dry and then sands the surface, which can take as long as two weeks to prepare. Ms. Myers does not sketch or block out her picture. She uses acrylic paints and a variety

of fine-tipped brushes for detailed areas. A commission may take as long as 6 to 8 weeks to complete.

Claremont resident Rebecca Gravett is a proud owner of Ms. Myers' artwork.

"She captured all the shading and shadowing of my home, the detail is exquisite," she said. "Her detail is so fine that she even painted the reflection of a stained glass window. We consider our artwork to be an heirloom."

Local photographer Sonja Stump is another proud owner of Ms. Myers' artwork.

"Our Claremont Depot rock has a lot of meaning for us because my father-in-law used to work there," she said. "We look at our rock and enjoy it everyday."

Once she is finished, Ms. Myers examines her painting for a week, viewing it in from every angle, searching for any improvements she can make. The unveiling of the artwork is always a special treat. Ms. Myers provides a swivel stand for the rock so both sides can be viewed.

"This is art you can touch," she explained.

She covers the rock with a black silk cloth and dramatically unveils it to the new owners.

"The reactions have been fantastic. I've had grown men cry," she said, "and that makes it all worthwhile."

Ms. Myers is currently preparing for a One Woman Show which will take place at the Cal Poly Downtown Center in Pomona on West Second Street, December 4th through 22nd.

"I'm so excited about this opportunity," she said, "I can't wait so show my new creations."

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