



Sandra Choate in her Goldendale studio, adjacent to a gallery filled with treasures.

Monkeyshines and Mosaics

Local artist breaks into an art form she has been considering for years

By Jeanie Senior

Artist Sandra Choate, whose textile creations include clothing made from vintage fabric and clever cloth dolls and toys, embarked on a new medium last year: mosaics.

Sandra, the owner of Monkeyshines Studio & Gallery at 514 S. Columbus in Goldendale, says she has sewn most of her life. But she knew she wanted to pursue a new art form.

"I've been carrying around this bin of broken Fiesta ware dishes because someday I wanted to do mosaics," she says.

Sandra took a class and made some conventional mosaic pieces. But because she likes what she calls "the surprise element in art," she expanded her range, incorporating broken china and china figurines to create what might be called mosaics with attitude.

The themes are varied: "A Night at the Opera," a figurine of a woman with powdered hair sitting in an opera box above a mosaic of faces; "My Kind of Man," cowgirl and cow figurines, a mosaic that

includes china pieces with western scenes, stars and stripes; and "Wake Up Call," which features a rooster in a coffee cup at a bottom corner, with a mosaic that includes a sun at the top.

Sandra says her joy in creating mosaics even has distracted her from sewing, her longtime creative outlet.

She recently started designing mosaic-covered boxes, including a jewelry box ornamented with a cherub, roses and pieces of dainty flowered china. She also is "dressing" a mannequin's torso in china flowers. The shelves in her studio are stacked with plates and saucers, and bins filled with more china pieces, including statues and figurines, all ready to be transformed into mosaics.

Sandra has the community's support. Sometimes when she arrives at Monkeyshines, she finds a small bucket of broken dishes, occasionally a broken tea-cup, on the shop's front porch. All are donations to her art.

Sandra was born in the San Joaquin Valley in California, and lived with her family in towns

around the Bay Area. She made theater costumes while attending Santa Rosa Junior College and for the Sacramento Music Circus. For 15 years, she worked for the city and county of San Francisco, first as a gardener and then as a garden supervisor. She also was a bartender, and had a street artist's permit to sell her fabric dolls.

Sandra and her husband, Ken, an electrician, moved to Goldendale after he retired. They looked for a place in the Pacific Northwest. Sandra's sister attended the University of Oregon and they were acquainted with the region.

The couple bought 5 acres in Ponderosa Park.

"We met more people in the first 24 hours while we were unloading our van than we had in the 15 years we lived in San Francisco," Sandra says.

For a few years, Sandra was part of Fiber Art Studio on Main Street, along with friends Beth Poirier and Betty Long-Schlieff. She moved to her current space in May 2012. Her studio is adjacent to the gallery, an inviting space filled with dolls and clothing, as well as her mosaics and the treasures she has gathered as an avid thrift and yard sale shopper.

Monkeyshines also carries art—including jewelry and handwovens—by seven Goldendale artists.

The business card for Monkeyshines promises eclectic and whimsical art and fine crafts. The variety of items for sale ranges from racks of vintage clothing—including numerous Pendleton Woolen Mills items—to vintage Scandinavian sweaters and charming dresses for girls that Sandra sews from vintage fabrics. There are jeans skirts she has decorated with vintage fabrics. Vintage aprons hang in rows at the top of the walls.

Sandra's sock monkeys are a decided departure from the standard brown-and-white work sock model. Most are fashioned from brightly patterned knee socks and are apt to have dreadlocks, antennae or horns.

A piece Sandra did for a fiber arts show at Golden Art Gallery hangs behind the shop's front counter. It's a triptych of Joan of Arc—as a young girl in the first panel, a knight in armor in the second panel and Joan being martyred at the stake in the third.

Seeking a retreat, Sandra spent a week this year at the Penland School of Crafts in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. It was a wonderful place to replenish her creativity, she says. ■

Monkeyshines is open Wednesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Top, a vintage jewelry box is now a unique mosaic. Middle, Sandra walks among racks of vintage clothing. Above, a collection of dolls are among the interesting finds in Monkeyshines.