

Everlasting Bloom

Artist uses flower petals and other dried plants to “paint” pictures

By Jeanie Senior

“These are my paint,” says Susanne Lorenzi, pointing to a shallow box of dried buttercup petals, shiny and brilliantly yellow.

The other colors in her palette, from cerise to purple to bright blue, are in a stack of boxes at the corner of her work bench: dried flowers, grasses, ferns, leaves, lichens and mosses, labeled with the flower name and the date they were gathered.

Susanne uses them to “paint” pictures—carefully arranged bouquets, landscapes, portraits of butterflies, birds, a fierce-looking salmon, even a Valentine heart outlined in tiny red flowers.

Each picture takes hours of painstaking work, not least because areas of solid color require the careful placement of individual flower petals.

Susanne’s husband, Victor, calls it her “very unique way of creating art. People always say that they have never seen anything like it.”

Susanne started doing the pictures in 2002, the year after the couple—originally from a small town near Bern, Switzerland—moved to Klickitat County from Canada. They arrived at their rural home northeast of Goldendale in the midst of a snowstorm.



Susanne Lorenzi holds a four seasons picture she made from flower petals. The butterfly below was made entirely from different colored sunflower petals.

“We had lots of snow that winter,” Susanne says.

Then the snow melted, and in the spring the ground in front of their house exploded with color as bluebells (grass widows) started to bloom.

“I don’t think we had ever seen grass widows before that,” Victor says. “They were just like a carpet.”

Enchanted by the grass widows, and then by the procession of spring wildflowers that followed,

Susanne started drying them as a way to preserve their beauty and color. She arranged some of them into a picture

and sent it as a present to a relative in Switzerland.

“She was happy, and that was the beginning,” Susanne says. “Then came the rest and I never stopped.”

Some of her designs are true to nature, carefully researched. A picture of Multnomah Falls—available as a print and a note card at the gift shop at the popular tourist stop on the old Columbia Gorge Highway—is an exquisite collage of mosses, ferns, lichen, and bark, with the waterfall done in individual white flower petals. The bridge is cut from birch bark.

Other pictures, including some of her butterflies, are fanciful and impressionistic.

Through the years, Susanne has greatly

expanded her palette of materials. When the couple went on hikes, she collected flowers to dry for her pictures. She soon was seeing potential in all of nature as elements for her art.

One of her pictures, a golden butterfly, is entirely created from sunflower petals in many variations of golds, yellows and browns.

When Victor cut firewood, he peeled off the thin, flexible cambium layer between bark and log and Susanne saved it to incorporate into pictures. Likewise, she saved the papery gray of a hornet's nest for a design element, using some of it for the tree branch perch in a bird picture.

Susanne also gathers flowers from friends' gardens after asking for permission. A plant whose autumn leaves turn from gold to brown to orange to red, was a particular treasure.

Trips to the coast are another opportunity to add color and texture to her palette.

"If we go traveling I have a couple of phone books (for pressing) in the car and a roll of waxed paper and the scissors," she says, joking that "there's nothing safe anymore."

But she hastens to add, "Not in somebody's garden."

The riot of wildflowers in Klickitat County was a revelation to Victor and Susanne. He describes Switzerland as "too groomed," without the roadside ditches where flowers flourish here.

Susanne initially sold her original work at craft fairs and other art events through the Columbia Gorge. She still sells originals, but has expanded to selling notecards and prints, which offers a wider range of buyers a chance to enjoy her creations, as well as letting her market her work more extensively.

Besides Multnomah Falls Lodge, her prints are available at Vista House.

For the first time Susanne has her own exhibition. The Lyle Hotel is featuring Susanne's "collages of botanical material" from February 5 to March 6. ■



Above, a collection of Susanne's notecards and print of her Multnomah Falls picture.

Below, Susanne at her workspace in her home north of Goldendale.

