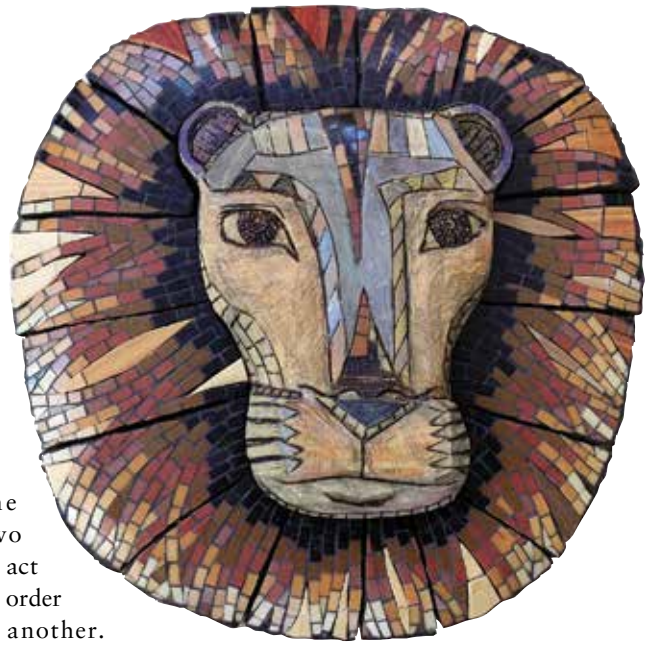


THE ART OF COLLABORATION

BY LEIGH MACMILLEN HAYES



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Meet Don Best and Judy Mayberry of Studio 448 in Norway—two artists who share a space and frequently work in collaboration.

After graduating with a degree in Fine Arts from the Portland School of Art, now called MECA, where he studied painting and sculpture, Don worked in a variety of crafts as well as other jobs to support his family.

In the early years, his artwork included weaving, jewelry and print making. After marrying a local veterinarian, Don has spent the past decade or more carving sculptures that illustrate his passion for wild and domestic animals, especially cats and dogs.

He and another artist originally opened the studio/showroom on Main Street and Judy became his studio-mate about three years ago.

Beginning when she was twelve, Judy had taken drawing lessons from the late Lajos Matolcsy, which led her to the University of Southern Maine, where she earned a degree in Fine Arts.

After a decade away, Judy and her husband returned to the area to raise their children. Weaving drew her focus until a shoulder injury affected one hand. Determined to overcome it and because she'd always loved mosaics, she began clipping tiles as a form of therapy. For the last twenty years, she's created home installations including colorful backsplashes.

Art can be a private affair and sharing the studio allowed these two introverts to

move out of their homes and into a spot on Main Street where locals and tourists could wave from the sidewalk or stop in to say hi. At first, they created individual work as they sat at benches with their backs to each other, all the while exchanging ideas.

And then one Christmas they took on a challenge—making ornaments together to raise money for the local food bank. Glass met wood. And all proceeds went to the cause, which was a significant amount given that they discovered they couldn't make the ornaments fast enough to keep up with demand. This has become a tradition and the recipient of the funds raised is now The Yeats Fund, to help sick pets whose owners are in financial need.

That was the beginning of their teamwork. They still do their own thing, but their combined efforts juxtapose elements of texture, light and scale in a totally different



way as they create 3-D sculptures that depict animals in a colorful, whimsical manner.

Don begins with a sketch and sometimes a cardboard template. “I stand back and look so I can make adjustments,” he says. As an ethical carver, he uses wood indigenous to Maine including basswood and white pine as a medium to bring his drawings and ideas to life.

“I usually do elongated figures,” says Don. “I like the aesthetic-like lines, the tallness of it.”

After roughing out the shape with a band saw, he turns to hand tools to finish the creation. With wood burning tools texture is added. Pieces are glued together into a wall piece or free-standing sculpture and the almost completed work is glazed before Don adds color.

Finally, he hands it off to Judy, who sometimes matches his wood-burning technique and other times follows the grain of the wood with her mosaics, all the while working to blend the tiles into the structure.

Her work is more labor intensive and requires patience as she painstakingly cuts the glass into tiny pieces before attaching each. “I do a lot of grinding to get the edges down,” she says. “I want to work the grout into the wood and try to make it not noticeable so it will blend into the bark.”

She enjoys embedding the tiny pieces and watching which way the wood and glass flow as they begin to form a coherent whole. Sometimes, she sticks tiles into nooks and

crannies, adding a touch of color here and there to a finished piece.

For both artists, the foundation of their work is the initial sketching. And the foundation of their working relationship is mutual respect. They are open to an exchange of ideas so that they each have a say in the final piece.

“We get along well,” says Judy. “It’s an easy art relationship as we give and take and offer constructive criticism.”

Their collaborative work is mostly one-of-a-kind and that uniqueness appeals to both of them. Each piece is different by virtue of the wood and glass and how the artists are feeling when they sit down on their respective stools. “We’d be bored making the same thing twice,” says Judy.

The final result—sculptures that flicker and soar like the birds or other animals they personify. The dedication of these two artists toward their work and their obvious admiration of each other’s talent is witnessed in the minute details. The sculptures have movement and fluidity intensified by the static glass that adds vibrancy.

From creating illusions of depth and playing with reflection and light, Don and Judy make magic with the work of their hands—where glass meets wood in the art of collaboration. ✨

Studio 448
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Open by chance or appointment

