

Art helps define history for

By Scott Woosley, DDC Public Affairs

Art has historically helped define societies throughout time. From ancient Egyptians to Native Americans, pieces of art are often what archaeologists find and use to determine how those societies developed and interacted with each other.

“Women’s Art: Women’s Vision,” was the theme of Women’s History Month for 2008, which began March 1. The theme was chosen by the National Women’s History Project to bring to light the historical contributions women have made to society through their art. According to the NWHP Web site, the history of women and art is quintessential to women’s history. It is the story of amazing women’s accomplishments, acclaimed at the time, but written out of history.

“This year’s theme will bring light to the fact that, throughout history, female artists were often not recognized for their work,” said JoAnn Schopman of the Defense Distribution Center’s Equal Employment Office. “Historically, female artists were often anonymous, producing unsigned work.”

Schopman contacted several women artists in DDC to highlight their talents as part of the command’s celebration of Women’s History Month.

Among DDC’s artists are Nancy Day, Leslie Whittaker and Suzanne Kohr. Day’s medium is cross stitching, Whittaker works with ceramics, and Kohr is an accomplished amateur photographer.



The carousel horse shown here was made by Leslie Whittaker, an administrative assistant in the Defense Distribution Center’s Acquisition Operations Directorate. The colors and the detail of the piece make it one of her favorites.

Day, who works in DDC’s Financial Management Office, first became interested in textile art when she was a young girl. Her grandmother and other relatives first exposed her to knitting and crocheting when she was 12. Her interest in cross-stitching came later.

“Many years later I saw a beautiful cross-stitched Christmas decoration and I thought to myself, I can do that,” Day said.

She became so interested in cross-



Nancy Day, a financial program analyst in the Defense Distribution Center’s Financial Operations Directorate, holds one of her favorite cross stitching pieces. The number of colors in the design made it a very complex piece and it took Day four months to finish it. It hangs in Day’s living room.

stitching that she now has several pieces of her work hanging on the walls in her home.

Day finds cross-stitching therapeutic. She says it helps her relieve stress and seeing her pieces completed gives her a sense of pride in her accomplishments. What she really enjoys about cross-stitching though is that it helps her carry on her family tradition and tell her family’s story.

“I’ve made baby samplers for each of my grandchildren that have things like their birth date, day of the week and weight on them,” she said. “It’s a little piece of time.”

Her daughters have taken an interest in cross stitching too and Day hopes that they will pass the tradition on to their children.

For Whittaker, making a ceramic piece

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DDC women

is about making something unusual. She enjoys giving them as gifts instead of buying things in a store.

Whittaker, an administrative support assistant in DDC's Acquisitions Operations Directorate, says she enjoys making unique items. She says that they represent something about the individual.

Whittaker loves going to craft shows, but she goes for a slightly different reason than most.

"Most people go to see," she said. "I go to see how it's made so I can make it."

Whittaker says she grew up interested in arts and crafts, starting with needlework. When she had her first experience making a piece of ceramic about 17 years ago, though, she says she realized she was hooked.

It was messy, but the satisfaction of using her hands to shape the clay, and seeing the results were very appealing. It's the durability of ceramics that appeals to her from a historic perspective. She likes the idea that some of her pieces may still be around 50 years

from now, 100 years from now, or maybe longer.

Kohr's interest in photography developed over several years.

After living in a city all of her life, she and her husband moved to a rural area about 13 years ago. Her husband noticed how much the beauty of the flowers and butterflies in her garden attracted her, so he bought her a camera one Christmas.

"I played with it for a while, but then sort of lost interest," she said.

A series of family tragedies, including the death of her mother, brought her back to the camera about three years ago.

"We found a box of old family photos when we were going through her things and I started restoring them," Kohr said.

It was a lot of tedious work, but she realized that the photos were a permanent record of her family's history. That got her thinking about taking pictures of her children and grandchildren for the same reasons. So she got the camera back out.

She started taking pictures of her family with the intent of passing on a similar trove of family history to them some day.

But she didn't stop there.

"I realized that we are losing a lot of nature's beauty as land is developed," Kohr said. "That means fewer birds and butterflies."

So she turned her lens to taking pictures of nature too. Her favorite subjects are butterflies, flowers, trees and sunsets. She has become so accomplished that a local newspaper did a profile of her as a local artist and she has also sold many pieces of her work. She has even auctioned framed copies of her work to support local charities.

As enjoyable as that all is, Kohr still says that the most important thing is passing on her family history through her photographs. She loves taking pictures of her children and grandchildren—catching memories and making them into another piece of family history.

"Those photographs serve as a reminder of a part of our past," she said.

Each woman chose their particular art form based on their personal desires or because of previous experiences, but all agree that their art provides them with a way to record their individual histories—and pass them on in some way.

Each feels that Women's History Month is important to help energize women to pass these traditions on. They also feel it's necessary to ensure women get recognition for their achievements.

"Eleanor Roosevelt essentially ran the country when FDR was sick, but she never got any credit for it," Whittaker said. "I think we have come to a time where people realize that women deserve to get equal credit for their accomplishments."



Suzanne Kohr looks over some of her favorite photographs. Kohr, a management and program analyst for the Defense Distribution Center, is an accomplished amateur photographer. Some of her favorite subjects are her family, flowers and butterflies.