

Creative Living

CLASSIFIED REAL ESTATE



Bob Sklar editor/591-2300

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Barbara Gentile's miniatures fit in the palm of your hand. Here she places the garlic-pressed strands of clay hair onto a Raggedy Ann doll.

Clay miniatures

She works in a downsized world

By Linda Ann Chomlin
special writer

BARBARA GENTILE of Garden City uses sewing needles and toothpicks to sculpt intricate features on her clay miniatures of country bunnies, bears, dogs and Raggedy Ann dolls.

The last creation, a lop-eared bunny gets lost in the palm of your hand. Many of the miniatures are smaller than a quarter or nickel, at their bases.

Gentile began to craft the miniature clay sculptures "about four years ago."

"I took a class with my daughter's Brownie troop (crafting) clay miniatures and I was hooked," Gentile said.

As she sits at her work table, Gentile automatically reaches for the block of clay, pinches off a small piece, then begins to roll, form and sculpt it in her hands. "Before long, she completes a bear no bigger than a sewing thimble, then begins another."

Gentile sells her miniature creations at craft shows, from Plymouth to Troy.

On March 3, she'll exhibit her country and Victorian clay miniatures at the Craft Gallery's Folk Art & Victorian Craft Show at Roma's of Garden City. Sixty crafters display their wares in the spring show, which includes country painted wood, soft



Raggedy Ann and Andy are colorful, with bright red hair and striped socks. Barbara Gentile's clay miniatures can put a smile on even the grumpiest face.

sculpture and Earl Americana items of every description.

FOR PEOPLE into country, "the current rage in home decorating is to fill a shadow box with miniatures of the collector's favorite things."

"Some people come to the shows clutching swatches of wallpaper. They want to be sure that it will fit into their home color scheme," Gentile said. "Another lady asked me to craft a dog in the same colors as hers, brown and white." Gentile reached into the box that

held a miniature population of finished clay wonders. Sure enough, a lop-eared pooch in a lying position sported spots of brown and white.

Gentile makes her miniatures from oven-tempered clay. Initially, she uses a pasta press to flatten pieces of clay to make clothes for her critters. Then with pizza cutter in hand, she cuts out the pattern to fashion a skirt, shirt or bonnet.

With a garlic press, she presses out streams of clay strings, soon to become hair on Raggedy Ann and Andy.



Barbara Gentile crafts her clay miniatures using a sewing needle and toothpicks as tools. Ingenious, she uses a garlic press to produce clay streams that she'll later fashion into hair.

Staff photos by GUY WAHREN. Staff photographer.

"I'm the only one to go to the garlic presses (in the store) to look for different sizes of holes," Gentile said.

FOR ANIMAL whiskers she glues, one by one, the bristles cut from an old toothbrush onto their tiny faces.

She "displays her miniatures at all juried shows," Gentile said. This ensures that the crafts are all high quality. "My husband helps a lot," Gentile said.

Gentile's husband, Tony, sets up the display booth for the craft shows. They have two daughters: Stephanie, 10, and Mallory, 6.

"The miniatures give us extra income to pay for all the figure skating lessons," Gentile said. "This is Stephanie's first year competing."

Along with clay miniatures, Gentile crafts heart-shaped earrings, bear pins and necklaces.

Prices for the clay miniatures "range from \$2.50 for a little bear

to \$9 for standing dolls."

"When people ask if they're fragile, I say yes they are fragile," Gentile said. "That's why I tell people to put them on a shelf and leave them."

Admission to Craft Gallery's Folk Art & Victorian Craft Show is \$2. Hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, March 3 at Roma's of Garden City, 3250 Cherry Hill, between Meridian and Venable. Call 274-2026.

Painter's passion zeros in on experimenting in abstract art

By Janice Tiger-Kramer
Special writer

Artist Lena Massara appears almost giddy describing how she plans an abstract acrylic painting — how she applies layers of transparent and opaque colors to unprimed canvas and waits for the magic to begin.

"It's fun to experiment with the process," says the Farmington Hills artist and 1990 recipient of the Artist in Residence honor from the Farmington Area Arts Commission.

As she shoots watered-down colors from squeeze bottles, then sprays the picture with a fine mist of water to make colors run, she says, "Maybe my technique isn't traditional but it's how I work best."

Before the painting dries, Massara might "brush the colors with the wet end of the paint brush or spatter on an additional color to complement what she already has created."

Though Massara's method may be nontraditional today, she points out that, like a schooled figure skater, she mastered the compulsory work before developing her own style.

"An artist has to develop skill, then see and then draw," she said. "I'd never have the courage to experiment today if I hadn't learned

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FOR MASSARA, mastering the basics started some 25 years ago when she began taking classes at the Birmingham-Bloomfield Art Association and through art workshops. She started working in charcoal, then moved on to oils, pastels, watercolors and acrylics.

Her basement workshop is filled with class projects: portraits and realistic still-life paintings that look more like objects d'art than class exercises. Yet Massara sees the paintings as a phase she left behind about eight years ago.

"My style is looser now. I enjoy



Left: Simple materials such as canvas and burlap create interesting shapes in this 24-by-35-inch collage by Lena Massara. For her, mastering the basics started about 25 years ago when she began taking art classes and enrolling in art workshops. "I think the work you really want to do has to wait until a door opens," she says.



Photos by GUY WAHREN. Staff photographer.

Lena Massara displays a 45-by-40-inch abstract collage created from paper, canvas, burlap and metal fragments. Though her method may be nontraditional today, she says, like a schooled figure skater, she mastered the compulsory work before developing her own style.