

Fiber takes a new twist

By MARY KLEMIC

When Elaine Brant Miller was 2 or 3 years old, she liked to work with fabrics. She believes she takes after her grandmother, who was a dress designer.

Today, Ms. Miller is still content working with materials. She works with wool in a way her grandmother probably never dreamed of.

Ms. Miller, 25, combines materials such as wool, wood and lucite to make original unusual wallhangings. The term "fiber artist" fits this West Bloomfield resident perfectly.

She calls her art pieces "Fiberworks," a play on the word "fireworks," because "like fireworks, they are so vibrant and intense," she said.

Her fiberworks can take the form of weavings or sculptured pieces, a media Ms. Miller developed herself.

"There's nothing like it around at all," she said. "I have every fiber book there is and it's not to be found anywhere."

Each piece of Ms. Miller's fiber art is different because it is created expressly for an individual on a commission basis. Her colorful eye-catchers have brightened walls in homes and offices around the area and beyond. The Forest Lake Country Club in West Bloomfield, the Michigan Inn of Southfield, a building in Houston and a hotel in Europe all have or will have examples of her work.

HER WORK WILL be on display and for sale 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 15 and 16, at Art in the Park in Birmingham's Shain Park. Ms. Miller also was invited to exhibit her art in the recent Lafayette Park Art Fair in Detroit.

"It's just snowballing," Ms. Miller said of her young business. "I can't keep enough pieces, they're sold so quickly."

She developed her sculptured fiber pieces about four years ago out of her love for two other art forms. "I've always liked weaving and fab-

ricating, and I've finally put the two together," she said.

The sculptured fiber art combines painting and sculpting. At first glance, each work resembles a row of giant, squat or slender spools of wool thread capped with rosewood or oak. The pieces can have any part of a wide spectrum of colors, from soft earth tones of tan and gray to bright, vivid shades of red and blue.

The pieces are versatile, Ms. Miller explained. They may be hung horizontally or vertically, from the ceiling or floor as well as from the wall. One couple is using a piece as a bed headboard.

EACH PIECE has many different perspectives and interesting shadows, Ms. Miller said. The colors that spring to the eye change when the work is looked at from a new angle. Sometimes she adds pieces of lucite to create added dimension.

When Ms. Miller is commissioned to make a wallhanging, she visits the room or office to "get a feeling" for the area where the work will go. She may want to match the carpeting or highlight a particular color in the room. Once she based a design on some red candlesticks the room contained.

"I create for that particular environment," she said. "I have never made the same piece twice. Each is one of a kind, for that person's home, designed for him and for that particular setting."

Ms. Miller said only the finest materials are in her work. She uses only 100 percent wool, most of it imported from Europe.

"Wools, to me, give off a better luster and last longer (than acrylics)," she explained.

If she can't find the exact color she wants, she hand-dyes her own.

"I try to be a perfectionist," she said. "It's very important to me that each piece is perfect. I want it to be perfect. It's important that (the client) gets the top quality."

A work usually takes between three and four weeks to complete,



Elaine Brant Miller has developed a fiber technique that is seldom, if ever, used by other artists.

depending on the size, and she tries to make commissions "as easy as possible" for the client, she said. She prepares the backing and mounting for each piece, so installation is easy.

"That person isn't stuck with, 'How do I hang it?'" Ms. Miller said.

MS. MILLER studied art at the University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan University and the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit. She taught art at an elementary school before beginning her wallhanging business.

Now, after less than five years, the business is an incredible success. Ms. Miller said that she has so many commissions she is already starting to outgrow her house.

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