

Artist promotes the fun of working with leather



Leather artist: Lillian Kaye at work in her Downsview studio where she designs and makes prize-winning leatherwork. Her goal is to get leatherwork back into the school system and commercial art courses. Her work is on display at the North York Public Library.

ZORAN MILIC/TORONTO STAR

"My goal is to get leather work back into the school system and the commercial art courses," said leather artist, Lillian Kaye, "Most people don't realize the things that leather can do."

Kaye thinks leather, talks leather, and lives with leather. Her apartment is decorated with leather pictures on the wall, a leather lampshade, and of course she carries a leather tote bag.

During the last few years her leather art has been winning awards at all the large craft shows, including the Ontario Crafts Council, the C.N.E. and the Canadian Society for Creative Leatherwork.

On display

Currently her work is on display in the North York Public libraries, and will be touring the area until Sept. 15.

From Jan. 15 to March 15 there will be a display at the Centennial Public Library, 578 Finch Ave. W., North York, and opening on Feb. 1 until Feb. 28 a display at Fairview Public Library, 35 Fairview Mall, North York.

Kaye was introduced to leather work while she was a teenager at Danforth Technical School. Unfortunately, due to family circumstances, she was unable to pursue a career in the arts until she returned much later to Humber College to train as a recreation therapist.

It was both here and at her job at the Workers' Compensation Board that she rediscovered the joys of leatherwork. For a while she was teaching leatherwork by day and working on her own leatherwork at home by night.

CRAFTS Ankaret Dean

However, three years ago she gave up her job to work full-time on her own leatherwork.

Her studio is an efficiently organized space, with tools, dyes and leather all conveniently placed near her work table. While she does have a few machines, most of her work is done manually, and requires a strong, steady and controlled hand.

Her leather art pictures are designed from her own life drawings. In some, she cuts the figure with a single line using stylized texture for the hair, and in others she sculpts the figure from the back, raising up the leather to maybe an inch and a half.

Kaye also works on a great variety of functional items which are sold in craft outlets.

"I find the material so flexible that it allows my imagination to run wild. It can be sewn, stamped, tooled, carved, embossed, sculptured, boiled, baked, dyed, painted,

ed, etc.," she said.

One of her most fascinating lines is her variety of key fobs. On some she uses the silhouette of interesting cars and pick-up trucks, and on others dog shapes or the outlines of historical houses. Using a completely different technique, she molds heavy leather into pipe holders, and recently has come up with a new idea of making a pipe holster, to save carrying a hot smelly pipe in a coat pocket.

New ideas

Each Christmas she comes up with new ideas for Christmas tree decorations, and she is brimming with ideas for leather buttons and letter holders.

Kaye is an active member of the craft community. She is a director on the board of the Ontario Crafts Council and the corresponding secretary of the Canadian Society for Creative Leatherwork. This society was founded in 1950 to improve the quality and design of leatherwork.

Anyone interested in knowing more about the society or in learning about coming classes may phone Kaye at 241-0730.