

Creative space: Nesbit Artist Builds Studio To G Wild With Paintbrush
By Chris Van Tuyl (Contact), Memphis Commercial Appeal
Monday, October 6, 2008

It's the equivalent of a child saving his or her allowance for a brand new bicycle. Miriam Crotwell is addicted to art.

Crotwell is showing her art at Cottonlandia Museum in Greenwood and TMG Home Concepts in Southaven.

She majored in it at Southeastern Louisiana University. She works with watercolor and pastels but mostly oil. She's a professional artist who stashed away the bucks accordingly to build a new addition to her Nesbit home.

"When my children (left), I said, 'OK, it's my time now,'" laughed Crotwell. "I got serious about it, I started really painting more, I set myself up an art account and whenever I sold something, I put it in my art account. So, I built this studio with art money."

It's a place for her to read, do crosswords and sudoku and to get relatively wild with a paintbrush. Northern light works to Crotwell's advantage with a wall of well-placed windows.

"I don't usually paint with lights on," she said. "I want natural light. "I think a lot of my art -- I would say 75 percent of it -- is mental: figuring out what I want to do, thinking about doing it and just preparing. I'll even set a blank canvas up on my easel and visualize, 'OK, now do I want to do this, do I want to do it vertical, do I want to do it horizontal, zoom in on this particular thing or not.'"

"Through the years, Crotwell has found learning from former Delta State University art professor Sammy Britt to be beneficial.

"He does a few workshops and every chance I get, I try and study with him," she said, "because in one day, he taught me more about color than I had learned my entire life.

"When you get really involved in art and painting, you totally lose track of time. I can sit there and think I'm going to work on this for another 15 minutes and I look up and an hour's gone by."

Crotwell is one of seven Mississippi Studio members, along with Coldwater's S. Kaye Harrison, Rachel Ballentine, Hope Carr, Carol Roark, Heather Ryan and Robin Whitfield.

"I've loved it," she said. "These women, we all get along. There's no prima donnas -- everybody just loves to hang out."

This past weekend, Crotwell joined Harrison on the Mississippi River to help kick off The Big Read program with a couple days of plein air painting.

"It's just a fascinating, fascinating process to do that," she said. "It's also complicated and frustrating process because you paint the light."

When she's inside the studio, painting with oils is her preferred way to go.

"I do some watercolor and I've been dabbling with a little bit of pastel here lately just because it's quick and it's kind of fun to do," said Crotwell, "but I really appreciate oil more than any of the other mediums.

"I broke my own record (in September). I painted six paintings in less than a month, but I've got two shows going on at the same time, so my inventory is real low. I need to build it back up."

One of those exhibits is at the Cottonlandia Museum in Greenwood.

"It's just what I live and breathe," Crotwell said. "I very seldom get bored. When I'm riding down the road on a long trip, I'm constantly looking at the scenery. There's so much beauty -- it's almost depressing that people don't realize what's all out there.

"I hate to say art is my life, but it would be fine with me if it was."

Visit her Web site at miriamcrotwell.com.

-- Chris Van Tuyl: (662) 996-1411