

Wearable Art 2014: A story to tell

By Megan Claflin, Contributor | Posted: Wednesday, May 7, 2014 3:30 am

Inspiration arrives in true form to the 2014 Port Townsend Wearable Art Show on May 10.

This Saturday, 34 artists present 55 pieces that marry form and function by utilizing materials ranging from the traditional to the bizarre to create one-of-a-kind attire.

“The diversity of this year’s entries is truly inspiring,” says Debbie Steele, program co-coordinator. “This event has evolved so much over the past four years and the enthusiasm and dedication of our participating artists have grown along with it.”

Once again the Saturday matinee and evening shows are sold out.

Steele says, the coordinating committee has opened up the 7 p.m., Friday night dress rehearsal as a “pay as you wish” performance to allow those who were not able to purchase a ticket to see the show.

Donations from \$1 to \$100 are accepted. All proceeds benefit the Jefferson County Community Foundation’s Fund for Women and Girls, which provides support and opportunities to empower females of all ages.

Arrive early, as seating is limited to 250 people.

All shows take place at the Elks Lodge, 555 Otto St. in Port Townsend.

This year’s selected artists range from age 8 to age 80 and represent a variety of skill levels and interests. The diverse roster speaks to the deeper meaning of JCCF’s mission, says Steele, as many of the participants are carrying on traditions passed down from the previous generation and building on passions inspired by a mother, a grandmother or a friend.

“Each piece has a story to tell,” Steel says. “And all are as unique as the artist and the piece itself.”

Spontaneous creation

Delaine Gately is a quilter by trade.

First introduced to the craft by her grandmother, her passion for quilting grew after joining her first sewing circle in her early twenties.

“[Quilting] is a sisterhood (infused with a few good men) that offers amazing fellowship,” Gately says. “More and more it is being recognized as an art and more and more I see women (of all ages) discovering their creative spirits through quilting.”

Sixty years later, at age 80, Gately says her “inner artist” has finally begun to emerge. In recent years, she has entered and been accepted into several national wearable art shows but says she is most excited to be participating, for the first time, in Port Townsend’s.

Previously unaware of the Fund for Women and Girls, Gately says she recognizes and “supports” the cause.

“Many challenges lie in our path today and it is important for older women who have experience to pass that knowledge down to younger women and guide them,” she says. “I learned from the school of hard knocks; I’d like to make it a little easier for the next generation.”

With a nose for vintage and rare fabrics, Gately is forever on the hunt for unique textiles that she repurposes into a variety of quilted blankets, wall hangings and garments. “I love reclaiming; it allows the fabric to live again.”

She defines her artistic process as “spontaneous construction,” often beginning her work in the late evening after an idea strikes and working into the early hours of the morning. On May 10, Gately presents an ensemble that she has been developing for more than a year inspired by two of her favorite creatures – dragons and butterflies.

“I’ve learned to go with the flow of my inner clock,” she says.

Gately – mother to three daughters and two sons, a grandmother and greatgrandmother – says she often forgets her age, that she is “too busy to be old.” She maintains a blog about her art and the quilting community and is a member of several quilting groups in and around Gig Harbor.

Out of the closet

Suzanne deMasso is a regular sight behind the scenes at the Wearable Art Show. Helping with makeup and preparing artists for the runway, she says she has admired the support and camaraderie exchanged amongst participants and event coordinators.

“Everyone, no matter their skill level, seems to interact as equals,” says deMasso, 48. “I dreamt of tossing my hat into the ring, added it to ‘bucket list,’ but it’s taken me sometime to build up the confidence.”

Despite having dabbled in jewelrymaking for many years, deMasso says she didn’t consider herself an artist. But as her piece has come together, her mindset has changed.

“It feels so good to follow through with it,” she says, teary-eyed. “To have the confidence in myself to put my work out there and to be proud of what I’ve accomplished. I feel like I’m coming out of the ‘artist closet’.”

The inspiration for deMasso’s piece is also rooted deep in her personal history.

“My mother passed away when I was 11 years old, but I remember how she used to crochet plastic bags together to make rubbish bags for car trips and such,” she says. “So as I was brainstorming my design it became clear to me that I wanted to honor her memory by using that same type of material.”

Using a mix of reclaimed fabric, plastic grocery bags and accents of beads, buttons and other “shining things” from her collection, deMasso has created a period piece inspired by Marie Antoinette.

“Wearable art can’t be put into a box,” she says. “It’s your creation, your vision of what art means translated onto the body.”

Her niece models the piece on Saturday, and deMasso’s sister plans to fly from New York to support both women.

“It’s been an emotional process because I feel like I’m paying homage to my mother, to my grandmother even, who would create a New Year’s Eve dress out of that year’s Christmas cards,” she said. “I feel like the women of my family are here with me, supporting me, inspiring me.”

Invoking the senses

Potter Christine Hulburt spends much of her time throwing clay at Daily Bird Pottery in Port Townsend. She’s also been a participant in the Wearable Art Show for the last two years – co-designing a piece with friend and fellow artist Aliina Lahti in 2012 and modeling Lahti’s 2013 entry.

“The positivity of the organizers and artists is what keeps me coming back,” she says.

However, it wasn’t until this spring that Hulburt, 28, decided it was time to combine these two passions.

“For me it’s hard to separate art from fashion. They are interconnected,” she says. “So, the idea of combining pottery and fabric presented me with this interesting challenge.”

She added, “Clay is often heavy so my goal has been to create something that appears light.”

Building from the theme of a “short and saucy” 1960s-style dress, Hulburt says she has enjoyed “creating in a different way.”

“I hope the audience can ‘hear’ my piece and experience it,” she says.

Optical illusions

Una McFaden, 8, is the youngest artist in this year’s Wearable Art Show but that hasn’t stopped her from creating an eye-catching and intricate piece.

“When my outfit comes down the runway I want the audience’s heads to bobble,” says McFaden,

an OPEPO student. “I designed the dress to be like a zebra’s stripes, you can’t tell where one begins and the other ends.”

Using one of her favorite materials – duct tape – McFaden has previously created purses and other accessories. The show presented her with the challenge of applying those techniques on a larger scale.

“I found designs in different magazines that I wanted to style my outfit after,” she says. “The skirt in particular was tough to get right, but with my parents help I was able to brainstorm some solutions.”

McFaden, who models her creation, says she’s a little nervous about walking down the runway, but “practice makes perfect.”