

Beth Eckert's photo collages as nostalgic as a crazy quilt

By Helen Schmidling
Correspondent

Beth Eckert's photo collages, hanging in the Sisters Library Computer Room this month, are happy combinations remade of photographs she took years ago. They portray her favorite things, and trace her life's journey from New York and Vermont to Oregon.

Going back to the 1970s, Beth made her living by restoring hundreds of antique quilts all over the country. There was, and still is, great value in the work only a skilled hand can do. But the hand sewing took its carpal-tunnel toll, requiring surgery, and the result that Beth had to give up the restoration that brought her both joy and income for 25 years.

"Ultimately, I had to stop," she said.

Surrendering to the reality was difficult, until one day in 2013, when looking through collections of old photographs; Beth had an "Aha!" moment: "I discovered I couldn't use the photographs for anything in particular, so I thought 'I'm going to cut them out and make collages.'" And a new chapter began.

Beth sorted through boxes of photo nostalgia and rejects, putting them into categories such as buildings, flowers, trees, clouds, seasons, sunsets, and such. She began cutting them apart and gluing them back together in ways

that seem both random and purposeful. She's also working from a collection of her 30,000 digital images, which she prints on demand for her piecing.

The final images are free-flowing with irregular shapes and cutouts like stars and sunbeams that replicate the appliqued embellishments found in crazy quilts. Look deep and you can find a lot of old buildings, doorways, churches, pathways, flowers, fences, and animals including many horses. There are suns made from pictures of pumpkins, and stars cut out from backgrounds. Sometimes images are repeated, like stepping-stones. Often the pictorial outcome has a specific theme.

The embellishments are purposeful.

"I love to applique," Beth said. "I made a schoolhouse quilt that was appliqued, not pieced. I adapted the pattern so I could applique it."

She also used to make appliqued pillows that she sold at craft fairs.

Describing her images, she says, "They create themselves, as quilts can do. This is interesting and different. I find that there's a lot of depth in the collages. I can look at them again and again, and see different things. Slowly, I've been selling them and giving them as gifts."

Born in Rochester, New York, Beth grew up Queens, and lived in South Hampton, Long Island, in the days when

"rural" was still synonymous with the area. After Beth's son was seriously injured, she moved to Middlebury, Vermont, where she raised her four children. They grew up and moved away, as children do. Eventually, a daughter moved to Bend, and convinced Beth to sell her 200-year-old Vermont farm house and move west, making the journey with her rescue dog, Roxy.

In addition to making repurposed art, Beth has a passion for rescuing older dogs, and giving them new purpose. The dogs have rescued her and become her service dogs. After Roxy, there was Bodhi, and now her companion is Angelo, whose full name is Angelo Cavallo Blue Bear the Gentlemanly Doggie Fellow. Cavallo, because he has a spirit of a horse, and Blue, because that was his original name. Angelo was indeed a Gentlemanly Doggie Fellow as he sat in the library and provided Beth with the spirit to reveal her work to the world.

The art will be on display through the month of June at Sisters Library. Hours are Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Beth's library images are for sale, with a portion of the proceeds going to the Friends of Sisters Library. Beth will also do custom photo collages with provided images. Contact her by email at eje.3127@yahoo.com.



PHOTO BY HELEN SCHMIDLING

Beth Eckert's work is on display at Sisters Library.



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