

# Eco elegance in color

## Mixed media artist gives old bags new life

By Heather Ruenz  
STAFF WRITER

Donna Tronca loves life, the environment, color and art, among other things. When she discovered a way to meld her passions together through colorful art – saving the environment in the process – she was fascinated.

“I don’t believe plastic is going away. I’ve decided to utilize the positive aspects of the material while doing my part to keep it out of the landfill,” Tronca, a mixed media artist from Palmyra, said.

About five years ago her husband, Dan Johnson, was talking about how much plastic he had to deal with in his business, and how he wished there was some way to keep it out of the landfill. Tronca wondered if she might be able to fuse it to create a type of “fabric” so she began researching and experimenting.

“At the end of six months I had developed a technique for fusing various elements with the plastic and achieved the intensity of color and unusual texture I was looking

for. Five years later, I’m still fascinated by this medium,” Tronca said.

She uses a wide range of plastic in her artwork – heavy sheet plastic, plastic shopping bags and even bubble wrap – by fusing, cutting, weaving, painting and stitching it.

Tronca said she is proud that her work is based on the principles of “eco art,” where each piece is constructed using re-used and recycled materials.

“I fuse plastic to replicate traditional and contemporary quilt patterns as well as traditional Japanese garments and designs. This is my way of taking traditional art form and treating it with a completely different aesthetic,” she said. “My focus is to create something beautiful from materials that would otherwise be discarded. For me, it’s all about the contrast.”

Mixed media, according to Tronca, tends to refer to art that combines various distinct visual art media.

“For example, a work using fused plastic that combines paint, metal and fabric would be called mixed media work,” she explained.

In being able to create many effects using different elements, Tronca said she, “can more effectively express my love of variety, a disregard for the “rules,” a passion for the

sensory and an open mind.”

### Lights, camera, action!

Tronca is one of the featured artists for the

Channel 10 Great TV Auction, a live, on-air fundraising event to support Milwaukee Public Television that runs through Saturday, May 4. See related sidebar on this page.

“The criteria is very specific and the process is a comprehensive evaluation of the work, and the artist. I feel extremely fortunate to be chosen as one of the featured artists this year,” Tronca said.

She was also featured on an MPTV episode April 6 after a television crew and staff came to her home to film her working on her art.

“The MPTV volunteers and staff are wonderful to work with. In addition to the auction group providing exceptional promotion and exposure for the featured artists, they have taken a personal interest in my eco art, and save plastic bags for me. Now that’s full service,” Tronca said.

### Creative, colorful mind

Tronca was born and raised on California’s Monterey Peninsula, helping her develop an appreciation for form and color early in life.

“The beautiful images in coastal rock formations and tidal pools, brilliant sunsets over the ocean, and soft wafting fog, all contributed to my fascination with color, texture and contrast,” Tronca said.

That fascination with color has always affected Tronca more deeply than some so she was thrilled when she could put a name to it.

“While taking a psychology class as a freshman in college, the subject of synesthesia was explored. It’s a neurological difference in stimulation that results in a union of senses and I quickly realized I fit the definition,” she explained.

It is estimated that 1 in 20 people experience one of several types of synesthesia; the one she experiences is called grapheme, or color synesthesia.

“I associate specific numbers with specific colors and vice versa and also experience color sensations from different sounds such as motorcycle engines, birds

chirping, etc.,” Tronca said, adding that it’s beneficial to her as an artist.

While her artistic path has been varied – drawing with pen and ink, painting with oils and acrylics, and exploring photography – she holds degrees in business management and organizational communication.

What she came to realize while working in reorganizational business consulting though, was that her creative mind helped her be successful.

“I discovered that one’s natural creativity can be applied to any endeavor, and in many ways, provides for unique approaches to problem solving,” Tronca, who is now concentrating on her artwork full time, said.

Finding inspiration has never been an issue for Tronca.

“I am inspired by everything! I work both forward and backward; meaning I might experiment with a technique to create a plastic “fabric” and then later decide how to use it in a finished piece, and I also might design a finished piece in my mind and then work in reverse to achieve it,” she said.

While Tronca said the medium she works in is openly defined and thus, there are “no rules – everything’s on the table,” it can fractionalize her thinking from time to time.

“The ability to focus is an advantage and I do that by breaking down the process into small segments working toward a goal. That technique comes from my business consulting experience,” Tronca explained.

Asked if she has any advice for young and inexperienced artists looking to up their game, Tronca said there are no limits and inspiration can be found everywhere.

“Give importance to the idea that creativity can be applied to any and every endeavor. Don’t limit yourself to the “arts” because you may have a particular talent, but be inspired by everything in your life and participate creatively.”



SUBMITTED PHOTO Mukwonago Times

Donna Tronca, a mixed media artist from Palmyra, works in her studio during filming for an episode that aired April 6 on Milwaukee Public Television about the Channel 10 Great TV Auction. Tronca is a featured artist for the auction, a fundraiser to support MPTV that ends May 4.

## How she does it

Mixed media artist Donna Tronca follows traditional inspiration for her artwork but takes a modern approach by using recycled materials. Below is her explanation about how she created the pieces shown with this story.

### “Winter” Kimono Robe

(48” x 39”) Inspired by the traditional Japanese Kimono Robe. The body of the garment is created by fusing layers of plastic, acrylic paint and plastic mesh to achieve a fabric-like appearance. Design elements are created by fusing fabric to the plastic using an appliqué technique.

The sleeves are made from a combination of recycled fabric and plastic. The collar utilizes novelty yarn and feathers. The design and construction follow traditional Japanese methods, however the materials are anything but traditional. The piece can be suspended or displayed on a stand.

### “Flutterby” Kimono Robe

(36” x 39”) Inspired by the traditional Japanese Kimono Robe. The body of the garment is created by fusing layers of plastic, acrylic paint, and other fused plastic elements to achieve a mosaic-like appearance. The sleeves are made from recycled batik fabric, as is the collar. The piece is accented with butterflies, created by fusing fabric to brass wire mesh and are affixed to the piece with brads.

The design and construction follow traditional Japanese methods, however the materials are anything but traditional. The piece can be suspended or displayed on a stand.



Donna Tronca with her “Winter” Kimono Robe



“Flutterby” Kimono Robe