

Key strokes

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Independence, MO — Betty Key is humble about her art.

Ask the Independence resident about it, and she's likely to steer you toward the murals of Ted Stillwell (with whom she co-operates the Blue and Grey Book Shoppe at the Old Blake Museum just south of the Independence Square) or point to the winner's list from the recent Community Association for the Arts show.

But her personal stamp is omnipresent inside the Old Blake Museum. It's in several of the paintings (including one she calls "The Disturbed City" based on a fiery photograph she snapped of Kansas City's Midtown at sunset), inside playing card boxes holding 2.5 by 3.5-inch creations called ACEOs (Art Cards, Editions and Originals) and on the mannequin busts, where Key's lifelong passion is on display.

"I've been sewing since I was a little girl at mother's knee," said Key, laughing. Her hearty chuckle follows most every sentence she speaks. "Growing up on a farm, we made our own clothes; I was the one who made her own dresses for the school dances."

On one mannequin is a garment titled "Leopard Goddess Gown" that won the fiber category at UMB Art Week 2008 and will be shown at a Union Station exhibition July 27 to August 2.

The bronze and blush-colored fabric is of an iridescent synthetic quality and designed to be ample for the wild child – Key advises hiring a spirit guide to complete the impression – or the more modest (a tie can be adjusted to lengthen the sleeves).

Another mannequin is fitted with something more suitable for a woman wishing to reinvent the risqué of the Wild West. It consists of a purplish knee-length skirt with a black boa and corset/brassiere befitting a more classy can-can girl.

Key also fashions men's clothing, though most of her work is outdated by at least a century.

"I really enjoy making Civil War-era clothing," Key said. "Today's styles are too ordinary; I'm a little more unique."

Lining racks up the stairs of the Old Blake Museum are oodles of outfits she's devised for that overcast winter morn or that sunshiny summer day – a tag affixed to a flowery number called "Country Girl" reads: "Add a white Dutch girl hat and wooden shoes and you're from Holland; match it with a straw hat full of wild oats to chew on and you've got the farmer's daughter."

Not far from the everyday fare is a bluish-greenish skin-tight costume called "Blue-Tailed Skink." It's accompanied by an image Key took of a skink during a trip to the Ozarks and a tail – a cotton-stuffed attachment that runs the length of the outfit.

"The Blue-Tailed Skink is the most common lizard variety in Missouri," Key said.

Of course, not all of Key's creations are sized for humans. A future exhibition will feature My Size Barbies as models for her handiwork.

"It'll be like a fashion show, only My Size Barbies will be strutting down the runway," Key said.

Key's embroidery work has appeared in the pages of numerous magazines and may be found on shirt pockets, pillow cases, table cloths and other home decoration items in her store. If interested in viewing or buying any of Key's artwork (virtually everything is for sale including hundreds of bolts of fabric she's collected), call 816-252-9909 or 816-860-1427.

Below are the winners of the 31st annual Community Association for the Arts show June 6 and 7:

Best of Show - Pat Deeter for "Ala Manet"

Photography

1st Place - Betty Key for "Not What You Think"

2nd Place - Betty Key for "End of Day"

3rd Place - Betty Key for "Having Fun"

Honorable Mention - Betty Key for "Without"

Opaque

1st Place - Pat Pummill Betteridge for "Stringing the Peppers"

2nd Place - Carol Wilson for "A Quiet Place"

3rd Place - Teddy Jackson for "Patriotic"

Honorable Mention - Venita Routh for "Poppies"

Mixed Media

1st Place - Pat Deeter for "Art Opening of Pat Deeter"

2nd Place - Eileen Wilcox for "Birds of Tropics"

3rd Place - Jan Balcom for "Free Spirit"

Honorable Mention - Jan Walker for "TPC at Augusta, Georgia"

Watercolor

1st Place - Jan Walker for "McCall's Duet"

2nd Place - Carol Wilson for "Five Apples"

3rd Place - Carol Wilson for "Flower Market"

Honorable Mention - Ann DeYoung for "Colorado Aspen"

Drawing

1st Place - Eileen Wilcox for "Mission San Cartos Borroneo"

2nd Place - Carlos Benson for "Joan Fontaine"

3rd Place - Jan Walker for "The Warrior"

Honorable Mention - Sina Ryburn for "Iris"

Pastel

1st Place - Pat Pummill Betteridge for "Jazz Time"

2nd Place - Pat Deeter for "Tops"

3rd Place - Pat Pummill Betteridge for "Feeling Safe"

Honorable Mention - Jennylynne Gragg for "Before the Sun"

3-D / Fiber

1st Place - Glen Friend for "Cobra"

2nd Place - Glen Friend for "The Chase"

3rd Place - Betty Key for "Leopard Goddess Gown"

Honorable Mention - Glen Friend for "Flowered Vessel"

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