



Photo for The Union by John Hart

Karen Lilly, shown with her gourd art, is one of the artists displaying works as a member of the Banner Mountain Artisans Holiday Show & Sale this weekend at the Nevada City Elks Lodge on Highway 49.

BY TRINA KLEIST
Staff Writer

A rainbow trout swims on a gourd. Flowers set on a primly posed china coffee pot. A wolf lopes across a necklace of hand-crafted ceramic beads.

All three artistic genres, and much more, are among the new works that visitors will see at this weekend's Holiday Show and Sale by the juried Banner Mountain Artisans.

The free event is from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. today and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday at the Nevada City Elks Lodge on Highway 49, less than a mile from downtown Nevada City.

Twelve new member artists are the result of turnover in the group in the past year, said board member Sharon Rigdon, a custom seamstress.

Karen Lilly is among them and offers a unique take on gourd art: Using buttery colored pencils, she

draws fish, leaves, butterflies, flies and other creatures in realistic and organic detail, inspired by her love of nature.

"People who do pencil drawings are control freaks," Lilly said with a chuckle. But the irregular surface of a clean gourd "takes all the control away from me."

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Therein lies the challenge — and, Lilly added, the metaphor for life.

In 2003, after recovering from a mastectomy driven by breast cancer, Lilly was moping over her "imperfection," she said.

But she realized she reveled in the same imperfection of her gourds.

"You can't even extend that to yourself?" Lilly asked rhetorically.

Now, she said, "I wake up every morning thrilled to have another day. (Life is a gift,) and I think art is a gift."

And life is what you make of it on the imperfect surface given us, she added.

This weekend's show marks the sixth annual show of the organization founded by Banner Mountain resident Joan Unter and 15 fellow artists in 2004. (Unter specializes in denim creations, stitching richly colored flowers, fruit and other designs onto shirts, handbags and other goods.)

The group started out showing at a few homes, but the show's popularity grew, and they expanded the show in 2008 to the Elks Club, Unter said.

Since its beginnings, the artist group — membership is by invitation — has grown to 24 people, all of them based in Nevada County.

Their genres include wood carving, beading, glass work, oil painting,

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Lilly Creations