

Ripley's wants it!

By Fan Staff

Mother Teresa, a work by Fruitport artist Cindy A. Craze, was one of 1,517 entries at this year's ArtPrize, a competition held annually in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

After starting the piece last winter, Craze worked countless hours over a three-month period to complete it before the April, 2012 registration deadline. No ordinary portrait, it is made not with paint or pencils, but with bread! Craze describes the creation process as a "slow and precise one that included the testing of various materials to determine which would be feasible, as well as hold meaning." Items initially experimented with were soap, cloth, and bread.



Cindy Craze shows the portrait of Mother Theresa which won acclaim at ArtPrize by Ripley's Believe It Or Not! (Photo by Mariann Cooper)

Bread was eventually chosen as the medium to represent the humanitarian and her tireless mission of feeding the minds, bodies and souls of India. Designing the portrait to resemble an antiquated photo, a mixture of dark and light breads were used to create the different brown tones. Dehydrating the bread at various temperatures created the unique color variations present in the white bread.

Craze's choice of subjects was not random. Years ago, after discovering she shared a birthday with Mother Teresa, she became curious about her, and began following the events of her life. This devotion turned into a quest to honor her compassionate spirit in a way that would be forever memorable to those who viewed Craze's depiction.

Over the course of the 19-day exhibition, which ran from September 19 through October 7, *Mother Teresa* attracted the attention of thousands of visitors, some of whom Craze met. On two separate occasions, she had the opportunity to greet those who came to see her work. This, she said, was "a incredible, life-changing experience. Most patrons asked questions regarding how I constructed the portrait. Some shared their experiences of meeting Mother Teresa, and all appeared to be moved in some personal way by my piece." Because she could not stay at the show full time, she thought of various ways in which she could still interact with those who stopped by when she was not there. So in order to "hear" the opinions of those she was unable to talk with, she decided to place a guestbook, complete with her email address, next to her work, and encouraged visitors to not only sign it, but also tell her their thoughts.

After the show was over, she sat down at home with her guestbook, and quickly discovered it was filled front to back with compliments and Mother Teresa quotes penned by people from around the world. While reading the pages, absorbing the words of her well-wishers, she came upon one comment that took her by surprise: "Cindy— Edward Meyer, international buyer for Ripley's Believe It Or Not! I think I have a home for *Mother Teresa*." Ironically, at first she did not believe it. She thought it was no more than someone being jovial — until she called the number Meyer provided. Following a lengthy talk with him, Craze arranged to sell her work to Ripley's for an undisclosed amount. Meyer also informed her that during the show her work received much attention from local news media (WZZM13.com), something else she was not aware of due to her busy schedule.

Meyer, who makes an annual appearance at the show, said he "arrived with a long list of must-sees that quickly turned into a short list of must-haves" that included Craze's piece. While Ripley's has 32 museums around the world, at the time of acquisition, Meyer assured her that it will be permanently displayed in either their Panama City or Key West museum.

This was the second year Craze, a 1987 graduate of Fruitport High School, participated in ArtPrize. Originally a self-taught artist, she went on to receive her formal art training at Muskegon Community College. Additionally, she creates pieces for private clients, and has shown and sold her works several times during the Regionals held at the Muskegon Museum of Art.

Aside from working on next year's ArtPrize entry, Craze, a self-employed photographer who holds MBAs in healthcare management and marketing, is also preparing to begin the second year of her doctoral program in leadership.

We wish her well in whatever she chooses. •



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