

Denise Morris Curt: A Limner's Tale

There is nobody quite like Denise Morris Curt in the country, let alone in New England. Curt says she is the only American limner using the jewel-dust technique. "I truly believe that a great love of beauty lasts forever with art, and I am inspired by the Renaissance musical compositions, poets, costumes, castles, courtesans, sculpture, gardens and paintings," says Curt.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, limner means "to illuminate, to embellish with gold or bright colors; to lay on color (1653)." Though the art form is traced back to Medieval times, colonial and folk artists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in New England practiced this technique on wood.

Curt paints on antique and historic wood panels from cherished New England houses, ships and furniture. "Each panel is catalogued on the reverse side so the history is recorded," she says. "The original patina is retained, but the panel takes on a new life to provide present and future generations with joyful exuberance and enthusiasm." People also send Curt old string



A handcarved mermaid, 50 inches long, by Denise Morris Curt.

DETAILS

- **Exhibitions:** Villefranche sur-mer, Stevenson Galleries, Stevenson, Md.; Yale University, New Haven, Conn.; The Stockbridge Museum, Stockbridge, Mass.; Publishers Gallery, Shubert Square, New Haven, Conn.; Harvey Hubbell World Corporate Headquarters, Orange, Conn.; Maple Leaf Records, Alberta, Canada; Bridgeport Hospital, Bridgeport, Conn.; and more, plus various private collections in Europe, South America and nearly every state in the United States

- **Famous Collectors:** Leonard Bernstein,



Denise Morris Curt's house-studio is in this 18th century carriage house in Milford, Conn.





Denise Morris Curt at work.

instruments, which she gives new life with her art.

Since 1957, Curt has been experimenting and perfecting her paint recipes to improve the level of vibrancy and brilliance in her work. In the beginning, she chose wood because canvas was too expensive; now, she wouldn't have it any other way.

Part artist and part alchemist, Curt uses a number of materials from around Connecticut to bring her colors to life. "From Madison, I get mica; from Roxbury, I get garnet; from Guilford, clay soil, which makes a brilliant orange; and from Milford, earth," she says. "Tempera pigment combined with milk curd, mineral

particles and jewel dust are absorbed into each panel [allowing it] to breathe. Beeswax and combined amber-resin finishes feed the wood, allowing it to shrink and swell."

Rather than sell her work through a gallery, Curt prefers, when possible, to meet her collectors directly. As if her custom work wasn't enough to keep her busy, she is the director and producer (since 1963) of 10 nationally recognized art and craft shows each year. Called "Meet the Artists and Artisans," the juried shows run May through September. **TCR**

Ossorio Patino, Vincent Price, Billy Rose, J.D. Salinger, opera diva Pamela Hoiles and the Richard Sullivans of Lenox, Mass. (Sullivan Papers)

• **Price Range:** "Prices on original tempera/oil panel paintings, stilled, stringed instruments, and archaic wood starts at \$150 to \$4,000," she says. "Photos are \$25 to \$600."

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"Pomona," 36 inches high.