



Secrets Of The Secret Heart



By Mary Burt

“People either like it or they don’t. They get it or they don’t.” That’s how B.J. Christofferson describes the response she usually gets to her art. Christofferson, the owner of the Secret Heart Gallery in Maiden Rock, was one of the featured artists in this fall’s Fresh Art Tour, held the first week of October.

Christofferson makes three-dimensional dioramas in boxes under glass, using collage and mixed media with found objects and ephemera mixed in.



“It’s kind of an old fashioned word but I think it really describes them” Christofferson says. “In the past this kind of art was used as a memorial or as a reliquary, or religious piece. Some people refer to the dioramas as icons, but to me an icon is a Byzantine painting that has been done by someone, usually a monk or a nun who has been trained to follow very specific rules in the painting of religious figures. I don’t feel that I am in a league with those people who do that kind of art.”

Christofferson says the basis for her art is Christianity, as she uses religious figures and symbols in much of her work and most pieces will have a religious theme.

“But I don’t think you have to have that set of beliefs to like them or get something out of them. Many different people have had them in their homes. They might be Jewish or atheist, but they like the symbol of the bleeding heart because I think everyone can relate to pain as everyone has felt pain.”

Christofferson admits being influenced by Spanish Colonial and Mexican art and her love of medieval and pre-renaissance art.

Her first introduction to this style of art came as a result of a trip to Mexico when she was 18 and changed her perception of art forever.

“When the Spaniards came to Mexico, they brought their religion and their art and architecture, which the Mexican people eventually interpreted in their own way. That’s the part I’m interested in,” she says. “I admire the way their beliefs and their art and their lives are all integrated.”

The dioramas are made up of many different things from many different cultures and countries. Sewing, painting, collage, cutting, pasting and some carpentry are a few of the skills she uses in assembling the dioramas.

Each diorama might start out with a particular object and build from there. It might begin with an old decorative frame or certain materials, or objects might suggest ideas or themes, which very often may lead to a series of pieces. Christofferson always



works on more than one piece at a time as the dioramas are built in stages and need time to dry.

“I’m sort of into a series right now about ships and navigators and water, maybe partly because I’m living on the river and there’s something about the water that I’m drawn to,” she says. “It’s a series about navigators, Christ the navigator, God and the Angels.”

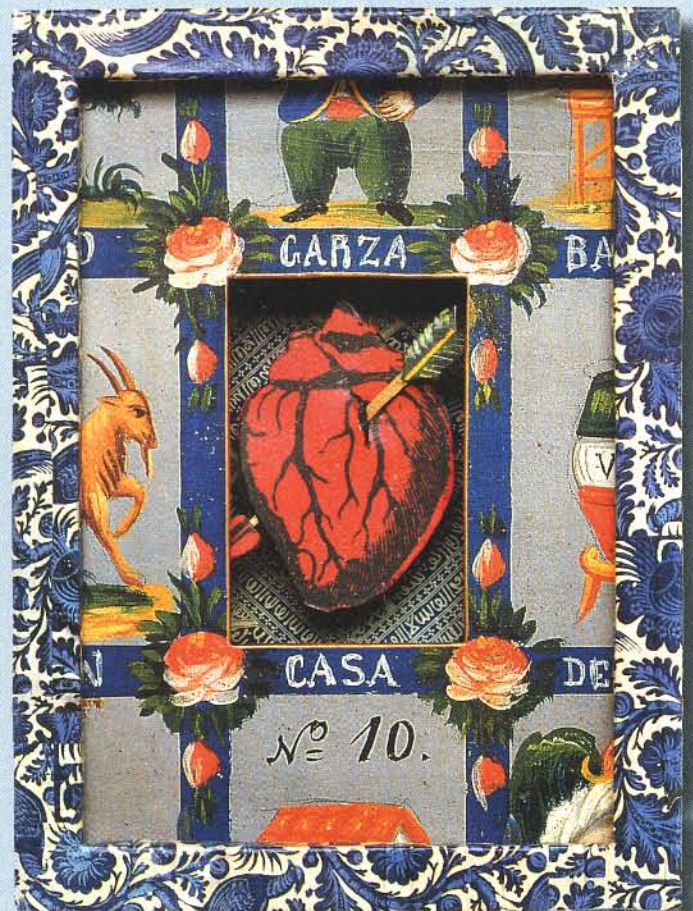
Christofferson has been collecting religious figures and symbols, old books, pictures, old lace and other materials for as long as she can remember and recalls making dioramas even as a small child. She picks up anything she thinks she might be able to use someday, shops thrift sales and antique stores and travels to Mexico each year where she finds small items she might sell or use in her art.

While her fascination with the diorama goes back to early childhood, Christofferson actually began to make dioramas to

sell some twenty years ago. At the time she was also raising three children, working full-time in the Minneapolis school system and studying to acquire a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from the University of Minnesota. She started out with shows in her own home, which grew year by year, and began to attract more and more interest.

“I realized I was going to make stuff no matter what, whether or not anyone bought it or not. And when I started doing it, people started buying it,” says Christofferson.

Last year she sold her home of 31 years in Minneapolis and retired from her job in the Minneapolis school system to pursue her art full time. She bought a small brick house overlooking the river in Maiden Rock that she had her eye on for years. After being completely renovated, the little brick house became a combination home, studio and gallery.





“I feel like my house and my gallery and my studio are really connected. I’ve always wanted to do this exact thing since I was a kid. The gallery has been open for four months and I think it’s been really good,” she says.

In addition to her artwork displayed in the gallery, Christofferson also sells pottery, clay objects, picture frames, etc. that she purchases from a friend who makes frequent buying trips to Mexico.

When asked about the name for the gallery, Christofferson says, “I just think that the heart in this and many other cultures, is the center of a person, the most central part of the being. The secret heart is the inner most person – it’s something I’ve used in my imagery a lot, in the work that I’ve done, so that’s what I wanted to call it.”

Christofferson’s work was featured recently in *Escape*, a magazine published by Sun Country Airlines and *Metro*, a Minneapolis, St. Paul magazine featuring the cultural arts and events.

When asked what she sees herself doing in the future, Christofferson can’t imagine being anywhere but here, doing the thing she loves best, making art.

“I think I’ve bought myself another twenty years of life, just moving here. It’s so beautiful with the river right there. I feel very fortunate – I think I was meant to be here.”

For More Information:

B.J. Christofferson
Secret Heart Gallery
W35553 Hwy 35, Maiden Rock
715-448-2005

The gallery is open from May until Christmas
Friday and Saturday from 10 until 5
Sunday from 12 until 5

