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GOODIES



Silk Purse or It's Never Too Late

"Silk purse from a sow's ear" and "it's never too late" may both be old saws but in the case of Christine Leddy, they're true.

This Darien, Connecticut, insurance office administrator, herself, recently blossomed into botanical artist and smocker. At 51, she is living her dream.

"I've been divorced since the end of 2005," she says. "In 2004 I found myself with a lot of time on my hands. My ex-husband had the kids. All of a sudden I had this time and I decided to focus." Before that she'd dabbled in landscape painting and took an adult education class once in a while.

Then, in 2004, she took a class in botanical illustration at a community college "and I felt like I had found home." There she learned of The New York Botanical Gardens' education program and the return to her roots.

"I grew up in that area. My father used to take us there all the time on weekends. It was funny going all the way back there."

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Leddy paints with color pencil and watercolor, sometimes together. Her first love is colored pencil, with which she achieves very fine detail and nice layering on the birds and plants she loves to paint. She accepts commissions and will come to you and paint a portrait of your garden or precious plant.

Smocking: pleating fabric into a couple hundred pleats that are evenly spaced.

But as with most artists, one art begets another. Her other specialty: silk purses made on antique frames, embroidered, beaded and smocked.

She is a member of Smocking Arts Guild of America (SAGA) which encompasses all heirloom sewing and embroidery methods. At one SAGA convention she designed a purse, drew the artwork and smocked the center panel with a pleater machine with 32 needles, then embroidered over front and back pleats to hold them together.

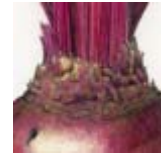
On a periwinkle silk purse, she designed peacocks for a sterling silver antique frame she found in an antique store. Each side has three panels – two with embroidered peacocks done in periwinkle thread with beads to match the fabric, and a smocked center panel with tiny crystals and pearls. The inside is lined with China silk and attached to the frame with glass beads.

Leddy welcomes commissions for custom purses if someone brings their own frame but it's harder to find antique frames now that they've become collectible. Once \$20, they're now several hundred. Sometimes a customer wants to incorporate something personal, or maybe use a frame that belonged to a grandmother for a new purse that matches in style and period. She prefers to use silk dupioni because it pleats up beautifully with sharp edges on the pleating. So, for \$500 and up, if you bring your own frame, you can have a one-of-a-kind beaded, pleated, embroidered, gorgeous silk purse.

No doubt, Leddy's greatest love is painting: illustrating plants and birds. "It's a tremendous gift," she says. "I feel very blessed. Everyone has gifts but I'm amazed at the fact that I was given this one. It's brought me a lot of happiness



Periwinkle silk purse with smocking and embroidery by Christine Leddy



Beets won 1st place award at Darien art show. By Christine Leddy



Silk purse with attached mirror by Christine Leddy



Silk purse Leddy made for her daughter with silk/glass beads and smocked center panel. Beads coordinated with jewelry she made for her.

and challenges. I got my certification in botanical and I'm going to train now for science."

Christine Leddy:

www.christineleddy.com/index.html

Smocking Arts Guild of America:

www.smocking.org/index.php

Reproduction frames for less than \$40:

www.lacis.com

**All art and photos by Christine Leddy

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