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IF YOU WANT TO GROW YOUR ART, PLANT A SEED (Published in the June 2005 issue of Columbia Home) - 6/1/2005

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IF YOU WANT TO GROW YOUR ART, PLANT A SEED

COLUMBIA, Mo. – Some say the seeds of art lie deep in the soul of the artist. For Dinise Mustain, they are in the garden too.

She feels a deep, spiritual connection to the world of herbs and plants. That's why her medium is pressed botanicals. She understands how to manipulate their colors and textures to create a mood or image.

While most of humanity connects with our green, leafy neighbors by eating them in a salad, cutting them with a mower, or putting them in a vase, Mustain sees pictures. She creates collages using plant materials, sometimes with a piece of paper or fabric thrown in to complete an image. Sometimes they are landscapes, but the most provocative are her pictures that involve women as subjects, evoking a primal feminine connection with the land.

The women in her artworks are often reminiscent of primitive earth goddesses, woodland nymphs or female shamans. She calls them her "garden spirits." Sometimes they represent herself or her friends. She is currently working on a series of seven women that she knows, trying to match their essence through botanicals.

A reading specialist teaching special needs students in the Columbia Public Schools, some of her original art works are shown at the Columbia Art League, as well as her prints for \$25 to \$52 and stationery cards for \$3.50. One of her creations, "Red Queen Anne's Lady," has appeared on a Les Bourgeois wine bottle as a winning design. Another, "Lady in the Moon," was used in promotional materials for KOPNs Women's Celebration.

She began pressing flowers only two years ago. "A couple of years ago, I just got this image in my head, this vision, and I created her, and that's what started it," she said. "I was just looking out the window at the moon one night, and I saw this image of a woman in the moon, so I sat down, got out all this stuff and created her."

Starting May 5, and through the end of the month, in time for the District's Gallery Crawl, Mustain will be the featured artist of "Flower Power," a flower-related show at Bluestem Missouri Crafts on Ninth Street in downtown Columbia.

She says she finds inspiration in her gardens. "Walking around in them, I just see

something, or I pick up a flower, and... 'Oh, yeah, this could be a cape on a Victorian woman, or this could be angel wings,'" she said.

Marilyn Vernon, a partner in Bluestem Missouri Crafts, really enjoys Mustain's work. "I think it's just so unusual and so really fabulous; it's fun on a lot of different levels," she said. "As a person who's interested in plants, it's fun to try to identify the plants that she's used."

Because of the perishable nature of her medium, Mustain is studying a method of how to make her artwork airtight so the colors won't fade.

"I love herbs; I love to grow them," Mustain said. "I take a plant from the very beginning, and I do the entire process myself, from the seed in the greenhouse to harvesting it in the garden and pressing it. It's something that people don't realize how much work goes into this, and that it's really a part of me because I've been with it from the very beginning."

In effect, Dinise Mustain's art is feminine metaphor itself, nurturing the seed until it springs to life as something beautiful.

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