

LEADER PROFILE

Anne has Christmas planned in many colours

AS the festive season approaches and the annual shopping spree begins, one Limerick lady can sit back and relax—she has her work completed since last October.

And this work will be much admired on many a mantelpiece this Christmas.

For Anne Fitzgerald—one of Ireland's most acclaimed artists designs Christmas cards for the Divine Word Missionaries, Roscommon every year.

"I have been designing cards for the Divine Word for as long back as I can remember—they are the only Irish company that I have been repeating designs for."

These designs include a series featuring the Madonna, a series of traditional themes and a series of cute designs.

"But naturally this work has all been done well in advance of the Christmas season—this year's series were completed by early October", said Anne whose work is loved and admired all over the world.

Tradition

A native of O'Curry Street where her mother Bridget still lives, Anne said that she has always been interested in art, but it was also a family tradition.

Her grandfather and his brother were both artists and they spent most of their lives decorating churches throughout the country at the early part of this century and this is an area which has also become involved with—she has designed and painted the Stations of the Cross for many churches throughout the country, her most recent being the Stations of the Cross at Our Lady Help of Christians, Castletroy, just down the road from her home at Elnore.

Anne has also travelled abroad to do this work.

"Drawing and painting always came naturally to me", said Anne who studied at the Limerick School of Art and Design. She then went to Germany where she did animation designs for a film studio.

Not one to sit by and watch the world from her gallery at Castletroy this ambitious go-ahead young lady is known internationally as the creator of the 'Dear God' Kids, which have been licensed for over a thousand products and now appear in 17 languages.

On a recent trip to Israel she found a selection of her 'Dear God' books in Hebrew.

What are these 'Dear God Kids' these animated cartoons have something to say to everyone—with the innocence of children they often provoke questions that cause the adult to stop and reflect.

Anne penned her first 'Dear God Kid' five and a half

years ago and it has been a success story since capturing admirers worldwide.

The cartoon appears six days a week in hundreds of newspapers in countries around the globe. They are found on greeting cards, posters, calendars, mugs, pottery, bed linen, soap and hundreds of other items.

Anne's home is dotted with ceramic figures featuring her 'Dear God' sayings. She has almost one of every piece produced.

Series

"I knew from the start it was going to work. I got such a reaction that I had just to run with the idea", and that she did leaving a series of Irish landscape paintings in mid-air.

"I am only now getting back to working on this series".

A trip to Africa is how it all began. "I was asked by a Bishop in Africa to design the Stations of the Cross for a Cathedral in Nigeria.

Out there I was immediately struck by the sincerity of the people and their genuine belief in God—they had this belief and I knew I didn't

have it. When I returned home I decided to find out more and I began reading the bible and the scriptures".

Continuing Anne said that the 'Dear God Kid's' was then a natural development.

And she now has to come up with 40 new designs every month. The ideas, well they just come from everyday situations. They are all clearly associated with everyday life and living and she sits being interviewed, she picks up her marker and draws in a matter of seconds a girl with a notebook in hand and the following caption 'Dear God, I'd like to interview you'.

"It's simple" she says, ideas come to me all the time", said the artist who has penned thousands of designs in the past five years.

Known affectionately as 'Annie' for all her cutie designs, Anne has six books coming on the market in the New Year bringing the total now available to 31.

And though her books and posters are available in Ireland she would like all the other products to be available.

Anne is now resuming work on her series of Irish landscapes—this series includes landscapes from every county in Ireland. Reproductions of these will be available.

Excellent

Recognised all over the world as an excellent artist, Anne said that up to six months of the year is spent working abroad, but in the last few years she has a special desire to produce something for Ireland—perhaps this series will fulfill this

desire. However she feels that when she does get an idea she wants to act on it quickly, but people in Ireland tend to be complacent and often reluctant to take a risk. Anne's paintings and tapester-

ies have been on exhibition in the American-Irish Historical Society and the Irish Export Board, New York. She also has an on-going exhibition in the first-class lounge of Aer Lingus at Kennedy Airport, New

York. Some of her tapestries which feature intricate and colourful designs also hang on the walls of her home at Castletroy. Various pieces of sculpture are also to be seen along

with many of her famous paintings.

To develop as an artist, Anne said that she always found a need to work on her own and not to be influenced by someone else.

And work is certainly no chore for Anne—"I just love what I'm doing and I can become completely involved in whatever aspect of art I'm doing at a particular moment, be it fine art, inspirational work or cutie type designs.

"But the one thing that is necessary with an artist is to be able to do it when one feels like it—this is not always possible especially when one is working to deadlines or commercial work".

Just before Christmas Anne is off to the States to launch an 'Angie' series of books, which she hopes will develop just like the 'Dear God Kids'.

And just recently two videos featuring this series have also come on the market.

Her favourite piece of work—"I have a special regard for the Limerick scene, featuring King John's Castle and signed reproductions of these are available.

The future—"well I never had a plan for anything, I was always blessed and it just happened.

Opportunities are just up to yourself", said Anne who admitted that she always wanted to try new things. I believed in what I was doing and I always had confidence in myself".

And for her Limerick fans she said that she hopes to renew her Christmas Exhibitions soon.



Anne Fitzgerald.

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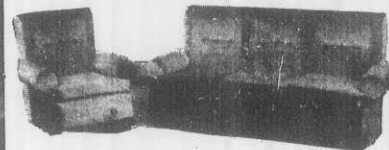
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