

The Marrin Family Artists

Readers who attended the AKCA Seminar in Atlanta, Georgia, this past June will recall the stir caused by the tee-shirts worn by members of the Inland Koi Society, and the buying frenzy that began on their arrival. Some had already seen the shirt design in the club's colorful newsletter. Many were familiar with *Norma's art* from previous years' pond tour designs, and were waiting with anticipation to see what she would do for 2003. No one was disappointed!

The design in question was the "logo"—if such art can be called a logo—for the Southern California club's annual pond tour, used throughout the promotion of the event on flyers, posters and tickets, the tour guidebook, and finally on silk-screened "tour-shirts" worn by the 100-plus club members and pond owners who worked the tour. Shirts in Japanese red for the women and grey for the men were provided by the club for the volunteers, while the design was also printed on half a dozen other colors for sale to the public during the tour. Each color used was also found in the drawing and were selected to complement the art. In addition, dressy "members-only" polo shirts in buttery yellow were printed, as well as sweatshirts in various colors for the cooler season. And after the seminar, a second printing was done after the shirts' sold-out reception in Atlanta.

What made the design so desirable, besides the great talent behind it, was the detail inherent in adapting an ancient and traditional Japanese drawing of a kimonoed couple as a backdrop for a trio of Koi worked into the very fabric of the robes. Seated on a black lacquered bench, the couple lean forward as if to gaze into their pond, while reflected on their kimonos are the very jewels they so treasure. His outer robe is a silken swirl of splashing waters in shades of blue; on his shoulder is draped Jack's

prize-winning Koi (first place AKCA Koi of the Year 2003), while swimming up from his hem is another member's fish. The woman's floral robe surrounds a third member's fish, the colors of which are picked up in the under robe's pattern which showcases the prize-winning blooms from the rose gardens at the after-tour banquet site, one of the homes on the tour. The perfection of detail, the color, the intricacy of the design is pure *Norma*.

Just who is this *Norma*, the one-of-our-own artist who has such a faithful following in AKCA? Norma Marrin is a quiet, soft-spoken woman with a radiant smile, an out-of-the-spotlight lady from Redlands, CA. She and husband Jack have been active members of both Inland Koi Society and the Koi Club of San Diego for many years. Norma is a talented artist in several media, although she insists she's "just a learner." She considers her art as "fun and recreation" and she takes greater joy—and we dare say, pride—in the achievements of her daughters. For you see, it is truly a three generation family of artists...

Born in Mexico City, Norma was raised in Los Angeles from age two. Art began early for her: "childhood drawings" gave way by age four to a penciled portrait of President Abe Lincoln, and by 6th grade she was skipping classes (with teacher approval!) to design bulletin boards. The elementary school did a production of the musical "The Mikado," and Norma and her mother did the 20' x 30' backdrop in pastels on heavy canvas. Four years of art classes in high school followed, but her focus was more and more on a boy named Jack, who she liked "better than art projects." Art was not to be her life work, so Norma attended Mount St. Mary's College in Brentwood, CA to earn her BS in Nursing and Public Health, married Jack, and embarked on an Art Sabbatical.

By age 30, Norma was back at the artist's table, beginning a two year study of Tole Painting under Jo Sona Jansen, bringing her second baby daughter Bridget to classes with her. Wife-ing and mothering, work and art occupied another ten years, and somewhere in that time she served time as a 4-H craft teacher with first daughter Tina in her tutelage. In that period, at age five, Tina's talent blossomed. In her 40's Norma returned to the student life to add Porcelain Painting to her repertoire: five years of portraiture classes under Vilma Alderman and then painting roses with Barbara Duncan.

Fish were not yet part of her training, but fate would bring them into Normas's life when Jack got his ponds and joined the Koi clubs. The Inland club used other artists' works for their first few tours, then discovered Norma's talents and asked her to design something for the 2001 tour. Using members' fish as her models—an honor in the club—she used watercolors on paper to create pond scenes for 2001 and 2002, and both were well received. This year was the *pièce de résistance*. Besides the tour designs, Norma has donated framed watercolor pieces for club raffles and provided hand-painted plates, fired in her own kiln, as awards at the AKCA level.

But what about the daughters, you ask; what is the third generation doing? Quite a bit, thank you. And quite well!

Tina, now in her mid-thirties, resides in Riverside, CA, not too far from the Redlands family home. She is an avid knitter, but is better known in her drawings and tapestry works which are exhibited both nationally and internationally. And how did she get there?

Tina created her first artwork working with her mother in that early world of 4-H: signed "Tina 1973" with the numbers all backwards (okay, so not the *one...*), it was a painted pitcher of daisies, executed with an unusually mature finesse. She continued to make drawings, paintings and clay works throughout her childhood and into high school, then graduated from University of California at Riverside with a Bachelors Degree in Fine Art, receiving

the Chancellor's Scholarship Award in Fine Art along the way. A Masters in Fine Arts was earned at the California Institute of the Arts, where Tina received the William Ahmanson Scholarship two years in a row. The prestigious artist residency program at the Glassell School of Art in Houston, Texas was the next stop, after which Tina returned to her roots in California to rest and pay off school loans.

During this time at home, Tina couldn't help but become immersed in her parents' obsession with Koi. As she explains, "With talk of *Kohaku's*, *Chagoi's* and *Tancho's* flying, you either learned the lingo or didn't engage in the conversation." Tina loved feeding time the most, seeing the fish at their friendliest—with a full frontal view of their faces—as opposed to the usual overhead view. Tina saw the faces as a doorway to seeing the fishes' personalities, and she was interested in capturing that personality in her art. She has produced a number of fine depictions of Koi in various media and sizes, from a 1.5" x 1.5" rendition in colored pencil on Vidalon, to a 96" x 60" (8' x 5') canvas executed in markers. She has also worked in charcoal on Vidalon, and a collage-like piece in acrylic yarn, cotton, paper and colored pencil.

Daughter Bridget followed an entirely different approach to similar recognition. College years found her at Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles, her mother's *alma mater*, with a degree in Biology and Art. Part of the college years were spent interning at the Museum of Jurassic Technology, and she continued to work there for six years, learning the arts of mold and model making. She also worked at an animatronics company in Anaheim where she furthered her knowledge of sculpture and mold making.

Residing in China Town in Los Angeles, Bridget has been commissioned for the last ten years or so by museums such as the Fowler Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego to make and exhibit her art, mostly her models. Others of her models can be seen on permanent display at the Museum of Jurassic Technology and at the Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum in Hagen, Germany.

Recently Bridget has embarked on a new adventure: making Koi-head purses. The inspiration, of course, came from the familial interest in Koi. While father was president of the local Inland Koi Society, the three women in the family decide to channel their artistic talents toward interpreting their beloved household pets, the Koi. At the time, Bridget had a Timmy Woods purse of a dog head, and she wanted to make her own rendition of it with a Koi head. Applying her many talents, she sculpted an original out of clay, made a negative mold, and then made several positive castings of plastic. The next step was hand-painting, individually unique; they are then hinged, fabric-lined, and accoutered to make them fully functional purses. The idea has worked; promotion is still in the working-on-it phase.

The closest families usually share some common interest or talent that keeps them connected through all the years of change. Art has been the common thread, inherited perhaps, in the Marrin family. And Jack's adoption of his Koi seems to have set the theme for many rewarding projects ahead, regardless of the media any of the family artists choose.

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Nancy Marrin
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