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Sneetches Spotted in Orinda

By Lou Fancher



Photo Ohlen Alexander

Liz Piatt's Orinda home is being overrun by Dr. Seuss characters and she isn't going to take it anymore.

Instead, she's sending The Cat in the Hat, a pair of Six-foot Sneetches, Horton the Elephant, Thing One and Thing Two, and more than 50 other soft, hand-sewn sculptures she created to Orinda Books.

The December exhibit, reflecting children's universal love for Ted Geisel's books and the store's mural, painted by Gerry Wallace years ago, will be installed for the entire month of December.

Piatt, better-known for her fabulous quilts-one of which hangs in the new Walnut Creek Library-took up the Seuss project at the request of her second son, Brad.

"One of my grandsons graduated from Campolindo in June 2009," she said. "The high school parents go all out to decorate the gymnasium, the auditorium and the outside area between the two. My son and his wife Trish asked me to help with the decorations."

The theme was Seuss and Piatt described the project: "They did a water scene with actual water, so I made a whole bunch of fish. Then there was a corner with Sneetches. I made two Sneetches that were taller than I am. I think they were about six feet tall," she paused, took a deep breath, and continued, "I did There's a Wocket in My Pocket-I made all the characters from that book. I think it's 23 characters. Oh, and there was a fourth corner where I made the two beetles."

After the graduation ceremony, a few sculptures were given to students, but most of them traveled back to Orinda.

"I had all these creatures, and my house isn't that big," Piatt said. "I thought, What am I going to do with these?"

Years ago, Piatt used to show her artwork at Orinda Books, so one call to owner Janet Boreta and the December exhibit was born.

The sculptures are made by drawing the patterns on newspaper, then cutting them out of flannel or felt. Piatt stuffs and sews them while watching television at night.

"I use pipe cleaners, yarn or anything that works to make things stick up right. I'll use a piece of wood, if I have to. I used old cardboard boxes and colored paper to make a chimney I needed," she remembered.

Her favorite is The Cat in the Hat, followed closely by the cellar characters from There's a Wocket in my Pocket. "I like all those creatures that are down there in the dark. They typify the book and I like how they turned out."

At age 80, Piatt sounds very much like the schoolgirl she once was, growing up in Columbus, Ohio.

"When I was in elementary school I read And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street, and it was magic. Oh, that was a wonderful book!"

She attended a private school, called University School, that offered an innovative art program she described as "tremendous." There, she learned to build furniture, practiced fine art and began to sew. The memories are sweet, especially as she reflects on the slim offerings in today's public schools.

"I think art is a very big part of life and can be used in so many different ways. I suppose it boils down to money. The emphasis just isn't on art anymore, but art is really all around us. I think it's a big



Photo Ohlen Alexander

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