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COOPER GIVES NEW LIFE TO EVERYDAY OBJECTS IN FLOOR CLOTHS & YOGA MATS EXHIBIT

By Keith Barber



Artist Kathy Cooper transforms ordinary floor cloths and yoga mats into works of art in her exhibit currently on display at Inter_Section Gallery in Winston-Salem. (photo by Keith T. Barber)

Thirty years ago, artist Kathy Cooper, a Winston-Salem native, stumbled across a piece of canvas in her studio in rural Maine and decided to create a customized floor mat to invigorate her kitchen. She didn't realize at the time she would be embarking on lifelong adventure.

After selling her wares at a local antique shop, Cooper was approached by a New York City boutique owner who gave her \$1,000 to create as many custom floor cloths as possible for sale in her retail shop on Madison Avenue.

"She said, 'This is exactly what I've been looking for.

Here's \$1,000. Paint anything you want,'" Cooper recalled.

Cooper took out an ad in *Country Living* magazine and her customer base began to grow. Soon, she was creating customized floor cloths for a number of famous clients including Carrie Fisher, Christina Ferrari, Michael Keaton, Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward and Henry Winkler.

In recent years, Cooper started taking yoga classes and inspiration struck again.

"I started thinking about painting some [yoga] poses on yoga mats," Cooper said. "They have the English name at the top and the *Asana* [Hindi] name at the bottom. My original thought was that if I use the *Asana* name you would learn that as you did the pose."

Cooper's original floor cloths and yoga mats are currently on display at Inter_Section Gallery in downtown Winston-Salem. The exhibit runs through Oct. 27.

The yoga positions or *Asanas* included in the exhibit include pigeon, tree, downward facing dog, butterfly, cat, crocodile, boat, locust, bridge, and eagle. The beauty of painting yoga mats is the fact that there are hundreds of yoga poses or *Asanas*, and the yoga mat dimensions of 6 feet by 2 feet is ideal for Cooper.

"Not all yoga poses make a good yoga mat but they're fun for me to interpret as a painting," she said. "It's like painting a rug — it's not small and not too large."

Since yoga devotees perform their workouts on soft foam mats, Cooper has found a way to transfer her original works onto real yoga mats.

"People are just so excited about them because they're so different," she said. "Not all yoga people want to look at an image when they're practicing yoga but a lot of people do."

Cooper's masterful use of vibrant color is the first thing that strikes viewers of her work. She has long studied the science of color and it has informed her as she transforms everyday items into works of art.

When creating a floor cloth, Cooper begins with a canvas that is typically 10 feet in diameter. She primes the canvas for paint, then cuts it and sews it into a certain shape. Then she creates an original work that becomes an integral part of someone's home. One of the unique aspects of Cooper's work is her decision to infuse spirituality into her artwork.

"I started kind of early on painting poems on my rugs," Cooper said. "Then I stopped doing that and I only did visual things. I came back to affirmations as another way to create positive value messaging because people felt so happy when they were around my work."

One of the larger pieces reveals Cooper's life philosophy. The text written on a floor cloth measuring 5 feet by 6 feet reads: "Take every chance you can. Live fully present. Open your eyes and see what a great big lovely world we share. Look for peace, grace and beauty. Listen. Sing. Love."

The idea is when you walk over the floor cloth, you see a word or phrase and you carry that thought for the day, like a daily affirmation, she said. Cooper does a fantastic job drawing the viewer's attention to the fact that every object they encounter in their daily life is a work of art all its own. Cooper's exhibit is a testament to how art inspires spirituality and vice-versa.

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A sneak preview party for Kathy Cooper's Floor Cloths & Yoga Mats will be held at Inter_Section Gallery on Thursday, Oct. 6 at 7 p.m. Inter_Section Gallery is located at 629 N. Trade St. in Winston-Salem.