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FROM TRASH TO TREASURE; AN ARTIST LEAVES HIS MARK

LARRY L'HOTE

BS Ed '63 SECONDARY EDUCATION- SCIENCE

Larry L'Hote opted out of a retirement filled with golf and fishing for a more proactive activity: turning trash into treasure. It's a complete turn-around from his background, which includes a bachelor's degree in secondary science education and 35 years as a math and science teacher at Hickman High School.

Larry L'Hote, BS Education '63, examines the 12"-by-14" wall-hanging in his hands. The 3-D portrait, a calculated combination of scrap metal, wire hanger and antique jewelry, stares back at him.



"It started out as Melinda Gates," he says. He cocks his head and studies the brick wall in Columbia, Missouri's Lakota Coffee Co., which is smattered with similar wall-hangings: abstract designs, portraits of political figures, new renditions of famous paintings, all created by L'Hote.

"It's always hard to decide which ones to switch out," he says, and decides to place his newest creation just below eye-level, in the middle of the wall. "But as I was making this piece, I decided it looked more like Sarah Hill."

The sculpture bears a surprising resemblance to Columbia's KOMU reporter: Her thick eyebrows set off her dark eyes; her hair is molded, as a broadcast reporter's should be; her attire is formal, with a navy blue blazer, simple necklace and gold brooch giving off an air of professionalism.

It's one of L'Hote's newest creations, and like all of the others, he constructed the portrait from recycled materials. He first displayed his collection at the Ragtag Theater, and moved his pieces to Lakota's 9th Street coffee shop in December 2006.

But he hasn't always been an artist. The retired science teacher and COE graduate taught at Hickman High School in Columbia, Mo. for 35 years. When his wife became sick in 1998, L'Hote retired and found solace in the art form.

"It just seemed more constructive than playing golf or going fishing," he says.

He admits that it's an unexpected path for a retired science teacher to take.

"It's a 180 from what I was doing," he says. "There's no carry-over. I create a wall-hanging, and when I finish it, it's done. I don't always hear back from former students or know about

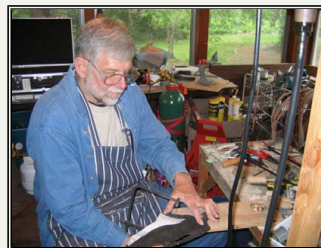
Lucky for L'Hote, however, local media coverage of his artwork prompted at least three former students to contact him.

Every student, L'Hote says, comments on the contrast between his life as a science teacher and his work as an artist, which is anything but scientific. He picks up trash when he thinks it will be useful. He changes projects depending on his mood. And his muses are varied. Ken Fallin's cartoons in the Wall Street Journal often inspire him. But so do Van Gogh and Joan Miro and advertisements in *Lucky*, a women's shopping magazine, and European fashion designers and political figures.

"I made a portrait of Hillary Clinton," he says. "And then all of the sudden she irritated me, and I had to wad her up and throw her away."

It's not a political statement, he promises, "Though I am liberal." It's just the way his creative process works.

Like with the Melinda-turned-Sarah sculpture, L'Hote adapts his artwork. Just as an education is more important than a grade, for L'Hote it's the creating that's valuable, he says, "What I love is taking something that's worthless and making something wonderful out of it."



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