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Windows to her world

Karanita Cox Ojomo's work is on display at the Fine Arts Center of the New River Valley.

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Matt Gentry | The Roanoke Times

Stained glass artist Karanita Cox Ojomo created "My Life in Stained Glass: Chapter 1" to depict some of her most personal experiences. Her work is on display at the Fine Arts Center of the New River Valley in Pulaski.



Stained glass mask<p>

Want to go?

PULASKI -- A radiation oncologist by day, an artist by night and a Nigerian princess by marriage, Karanita Cox Ojomo leads a life as colorful as the stained glass she has on display in the Fine Arts Center of the New River Valley.

The exhibit, "Glass Appreciation 101," features plates, window hangings, figurines and other gifts inspired by Ojomo's surroundings. A window hanging of a shimmering pink gown with marble detail was inspired by an image on a postage stamp. Another depicting a bowl of deep purple and orange fruit was created from an image on a thank-you card. A bold African fabric coated in poly resin and decorated with paua shells became an intriguing glass plate.

"Usually when I look at fabric I think it should be a plate," Ojomo said with a chuckle. "I think the whole world should be stained glass."

Ojomo took her first stained-glass class at the Fine Arts Center of the New River Valley in 2002. Since then, she's taken a week-long art class at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tenn., and her work has appeared in the Virginia Governor's Mansion, the Jefferson Center in Roanoke and the Art Place in Chilhowie, she said.

This is her first solo exhibit at the Fine Arts Center, though her pieces have appeared as parts of other exhibits there.

Ojomo moved to Pulaski in 1999 when she accepted a job with Blue Ridge Cancer Care Center. She treats cancer patients at Pulaski Community Hospital's New River Valley Cancer Care Center. Having grown up in Atlanta, attended college and medical school in Norfolk and lived in Washington, D.C., and New York, moving to a small town was a lifestyle change for Ojomo.

"This is a great place," she said. "I tell all my friends I live in Mayberry. Everybody knows everybody."

Ojomo has served on the board of directors and is currently president of the fine arts center.

But for the rest of her story, study the largest piece in the gallery, "My

"Glass Appreciation 101" is on display through December.

- Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday
- Location: Fine Arts Center of the New River Valley, 21 W. Main St., Pulaski
- Information: 980-7363

Life in Stained Glass: Chapter 1." Created over four weeks, the nine windows within a window depict some of her most personal experiences.

In the upper left corner, the Pisces symbol represents her February birth. A pair of red high heels in the next block shows her flair for fashion.

The third block on the top row shows the face of an elegantly dressed prince -- her husband, Festus Ojomo. The two met in college, and her fascination with his Nigerian heritage comes out often in her work.

On the second row, a figure of a tiny boy represents her love for her son, who is now 28. Clasped hands in the middle block represent her faith. In

the next block, a girl -- Karanita's stepdaughter who is now 30. A bell on the bottom row reminds Ojomo of the line "Every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings" from her favorite movie, "It's a Wonderful Life."

The next block is a rainbow scene from her favorite play, "for colored girls who consider suicide when the rainbow is enuff," and a lab coat and stethoscope in the ninth block represents her life as a cancer doctor.

"My Life in Stained Glass: Chapter 1" was created through a process Ojomo calls liquifusion, layering and grouting glass on top of glass. It's one of the newer techniques that Ojomo has tried.

"I read that technique, I kid you not, 25 times," she said.

The piece is one of the few items not for sale in the gallery. Others include a purple angel figurine called "Amy" that Ojomo created for a friend whose daughter died.

Beyond that, the pieces range in price from \$45 to \$300. Rhonda Hodge, administrative assistant at the fine arts center, said the exhibit has been heavily visited.

"The exhibit has been very popular in the community," she said. "It's a great showing of different types of stained glass."

Ojomo said she typically works on her art at night, with music or a book on tape playing in the background. It's not terribly hard to make the transition from being a doctor to being an artist, she said.

Both activities are incredibly personal to her. Many of her cancer patients are fellow artists and friends.

"When they bring their work to show you, it makes them so much more human," Ojomo said. "It makes you want to take care of them even more."

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