

## 'An illusion of normalcy'

Chicago artist influenced by her work with Alzheimer's patients to exhibit work at ICC. **Page C3**

# Arts



Lori Daniels stands among her work at her rural Peoria County home where she uses antique tin ceiling tiles painted and covered in a glaze Daniels patented with partner Stephen White.

# Lofty aspirations

## Peoria County woman turns antique tin ceiling tile into modern art

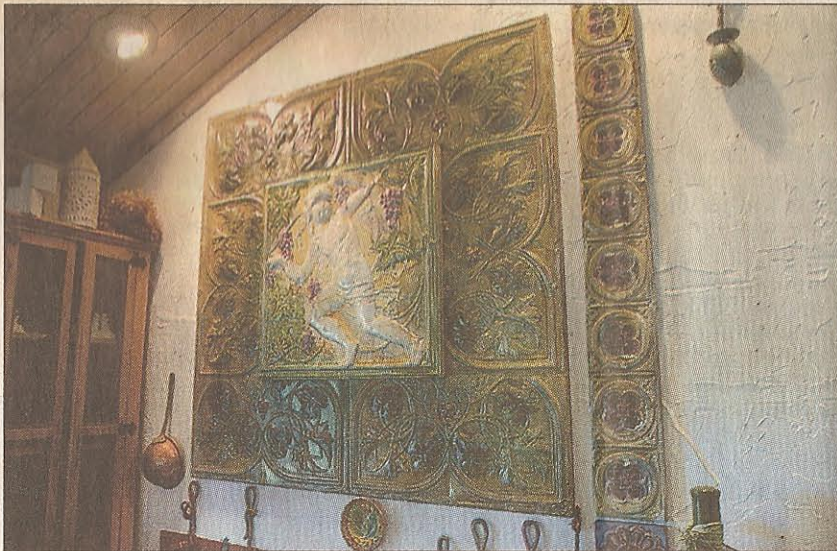
Is it art or is it craft? Painters and sculptors rarely confront the question, but tin tile artist Lori Daniels tussles with it regularly. She brings a quick laugh and a gentle rebuff to the question, but a firm ideological perspective.

Often garbed in sweeping robes with a procession of adoring cats and puppies trailing behind her, Daniels works in a studio next to the 1870s farmhouse she shares with partner Stephen White. The studio, house, multiple additions and surrounding seven acres bulge with art and artifact that speak of the passage of time.

An art and sculpture major at Bradley University graduating in 1992, Daniels, 51, worked as an antique dealer for 20 years, doing her art on the side, before she became fascinated with antique tin ceiling tiles.

Since inventing and subsequently patenting a glaze for the rusted metal tiles two years ago, Daniels and White often work seven days a week to keep up with demand.

"I'm not embarrassed to paint art to match someone's couch or linens or glassware," said the Mapleton artist. "But no, this is not craft. It is a progression of my work. No two pieces are alike. I couldn't duplicate a piece if I tried. Other artists who look at the work can't believe the glaze is not baked on."



A favorite Lori Daniels work, with a raised center panel, hangs on the wall in the kitchen of the farmhouse she shares with partner Stephen White.

Originally, she painted and sold pieces measuring 6 inches by 6 inches. Now, with her patented glaze, she creates collages of tiles with colors that are nuanced and subtle as well as bold and loud. She has a palette she refers to as her Majolica colors: ruby, mist pink, cobalt, green, yellow mist, celadon, toffee and lavender. There is the rust palette with burnt umber, sepia, brown, gray, ecru and

charcoal.

"The theme of time runs through these pieces. What does time do to things? This tin still whispers. I can hear it in the middle of the night. Those pieces that were once in Bergner's in Peoria or Marshall Field's in Chicago ... those pieces speak of another life," she said.

She has a 2-foot-by-6-foot piece in the Peoria Art Guild Members' show

on display now through Nov. 12. Her maximum size usually is 6 feet by 6 feet, but she has done larger installation pieces.

Tin ceiling tile was popular from about the 1870s to 1900. It was used primarily in commercial buildings rather than homes. Each pattern creates a different canvas for Daniels. She works with a variety of tin patterns, including designs she refers to as Victorian Baroque, sunflower, Baroque "H," Victorian net, Baroque "X," old man winter, winged griffins, angels, Celtic knot and chrysanthemums.

Originally, Daniels used paint on individual tiles. Sales were good. When she invented the glazing technique, she began making collages.

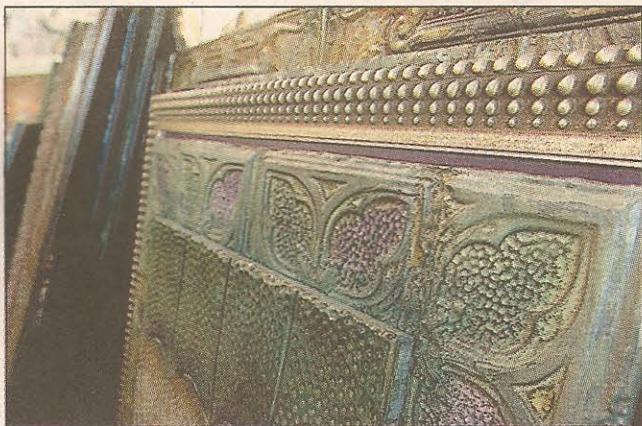
April Sepich, at Junction Gallery & Frame Design in Peoria's Metro Centre, said, "I'm a huge fan of hers. These pieces stand alone or work in groupings. They are textural with rich, luscious colors. Oil on canvas, oil on paper or these collages with glaze create an abstract image."

The line between art and fine craft is blurred, said Pam Ayres, Bradley University's director of galleries, exhibitions and collections. Is illustration made for reproduction as a book or magazine cover considered art? Is pottery made for functional use versus sculpture considered art?

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Lori Daniels' work is created to be hung framed, as shown, or unframed.

DAVID ZALAZNIK/  
JOURNAL STAR



## TILE

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"There is a hierarchy in art that goes back to the guild system. The master status is not the most American contemporary approach. I'm interested in any way we approach art," Ayres said.

Susie Mathews, the Peoria Art Guild's education director, said, "It's an interesting and an age-old question. The distinction may not be as big as people wish to make.

"In craft, the idea is a skill is learned and repeated over and over. It is a learned process that once learned is complete. Art is an evolving process that gets better and changes."

The concept of art changes with taste over time.

"Artists don't paint the Sistine Chapel anymore. Art changes with time and responds to what people want," Mathews said.

Daniels said she keeps 20 percent of everything she does. She calls her art "a self-taught progression" and

keeping a portion of each developmental stage enables her to see the direction her work is taking. She estimates past sales have exceeded 20,000 square feet of tin ceiling tile. Prices for most pieces range from \$25 to \$5,000.

She and her partner buy antique tin ceiling from throughout the Midwest and are always searching. They used to sell in 500 shops primarily in the Midwest, but they've pulled back to the top half-dozen shops.

"I was in Galena a few weeks ago, and a shop owner liked what she saw and bought \$25,000 worth. I've been asked by a gallery in Santa Fe to send photos of some pieces," Daniels said.

Whether it's art, fine craft or outsider art, the answer, Daniels believes, lies in the journey.

"This is a great adventure. The progression of my life is on my walls. I know where I've been, but not where I'm going."

She and her partner laughed at that notion.

"When we get a call that a building is being demolished, we get out there quickly," she said. Developers don't like to wait for two artists to come and remove antique, often rusty and torn, metal ceilings when the noise of the bulldozer is drowning out the soft whisper of antique tin tiles.

### ON THE WEB

Visit Lori Daniels' Web page at [www.tinemporium.com](http://www.tinemporium.com) or call her at 565-4876.