



Everything Michigan

## Giant hearts rekindle artist's creative side, help Haiti

By Jennifer Ackerman-Haywood | The Grand Ra...

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After the Jan. 12 earthquake rocked Haiti, Mary Thomasma anxiously watched the news footage of the widespread devastation.

Two women from her church Bible study were in Haiti, but back here in West Michigan, there was nothing anyone could do to help them but pray and wait.

While she waited for word of their safety, the Grand Rapids Township artist, who is known locally for the designer floor cloths she paints and sells under the name Floor Cloths by Mary Claire, got an idea. She picked up her paintbrush and started making large heart-shaped door art she calls Hearts for Haiti.

She shared her idea with people at church and the gym, and immediately orders started pouring in. Within the first week, Thomasma had 50 orders for custom wooden hearts featuring a variety of the bold colored floral patterns, plaids and stripes reminiscent of her floor cloths. The hearts come with wire hangers embellished with bows to make for easy hanging on the front door or an interior wall.

Thomasma, 56, sells each heart for \$40 and donates \$5 of every sale to the Mission Possible, an Ohio-based charity aiding the people of Haiti.

"It's makes me happy to make other people happy," Thomasma said. "I want them to look at (the hearts) and smile."

This project is a re-entry of sorts for Thomasma, who divorced three years ago and pulled back a bit from her art to regroup and figure out what was next. The emotional strain combined with a down economy made making a living painting floor cloths challenging.

"I had been searching for an expansion in my business and through a tragedy I realized what to do," Thomasma said, explaining she was inspired to start painting hearts to help the people of Haiti. "It's a way to help and has launched my business in a new direction."

Thomasma started painting floor cloths in the mid-'90s. And even though her work has been featured in "Better Homes and Gardens" and showcased repeatedly at local Parade of Homes events, she admits she worried her artistic talent was starting to fade when she wasn't painting every day.

"When you're not doing it as often, you wonder if it's there," she said. "It's been hard."

After seeing Thomasma with a sampling of her painted hearts, it's clear she's still got it.



Jennifer Ackerman-Haywood | The Grand Rapids Press

Local artist Mary Thomasma is selling hand-painted door art to benefit relief efforts in Haiti. She sells the hearts for \$40 each and donates \$5 of every sale to charity.

"I'm extremely excited about doing this," said Thomasma, surrounded by a collection of heart art ready for delivery. "It's a wonderful way to give back."

Thomasma, who is a self-taught artist, said she plans to continue making door art in the future and would like to keep donating a portion of the sales to charity. She is looking for a corporate sponsor to match her \$5 per sale donation for the Haiti effort.

Thomasma said the hearts are "not a big money maker, but it's a great way for me to get back out there and to give back."

To other artists looking to start selling their work, Thomasma says: "Get out there and get that business card printed and present your idea."

And, if you can help somebody else in the process, more power to you.

Send your comments and story ideas to Jennifer Ackerman-Haywood at [jennifer@craftsanity.com](mailto:jennifer@craftsanity.com). Watch Jennifer demonstrate craft projects at 9 a.m. Fridays on WZZM-TV Channel 13's "Take Five & Company" and download her free craft project tutorials at [craftsanity.com](http://craftsanity.com).

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### HEART FOR HAITI

To buy, call 940-0400 or e-mail [mcfloor2door@yahoo.com](mailto:mcfloor2door@yahoo.com) to order a painted wood piece of door art for your front door. The cost is \$40, with \$5 of each sale going to the Mission Possible charity effort in Haiti ([ourmissionispossible.org](http://ourmissionispossible.org)).

- See more of **Mary Thomasma's artwork**

- Shop for a variety of handmade goods donated by artisans from around the globe: [crafthope.etsy.com](http://crafthope.etsy.com)

Find out how to donate a handmade item to the cause: [crafthope.com](http://crafthope.com)