

A BOULDER CANVAS

Claremont artist Dawn Grimes takes full advantage of nature's gifts.



Claremont artist Dawn Grimes has found her life's passion—painting buildings, structures and people's homes onto rocks. Pictured here, Ms. Grimes sits at a local rock quarry where she frequently goes to find the perfect stone to paint on. COURIER photos/Gabriel Fenoy



Dawn Grimes has painted dozens of Claremont homes and buildings on rocks, like this one of the Babineau residence on Baseline Road. Ms. Grimes uses photographs to render each and every detail of the subject onto her stone canvases.

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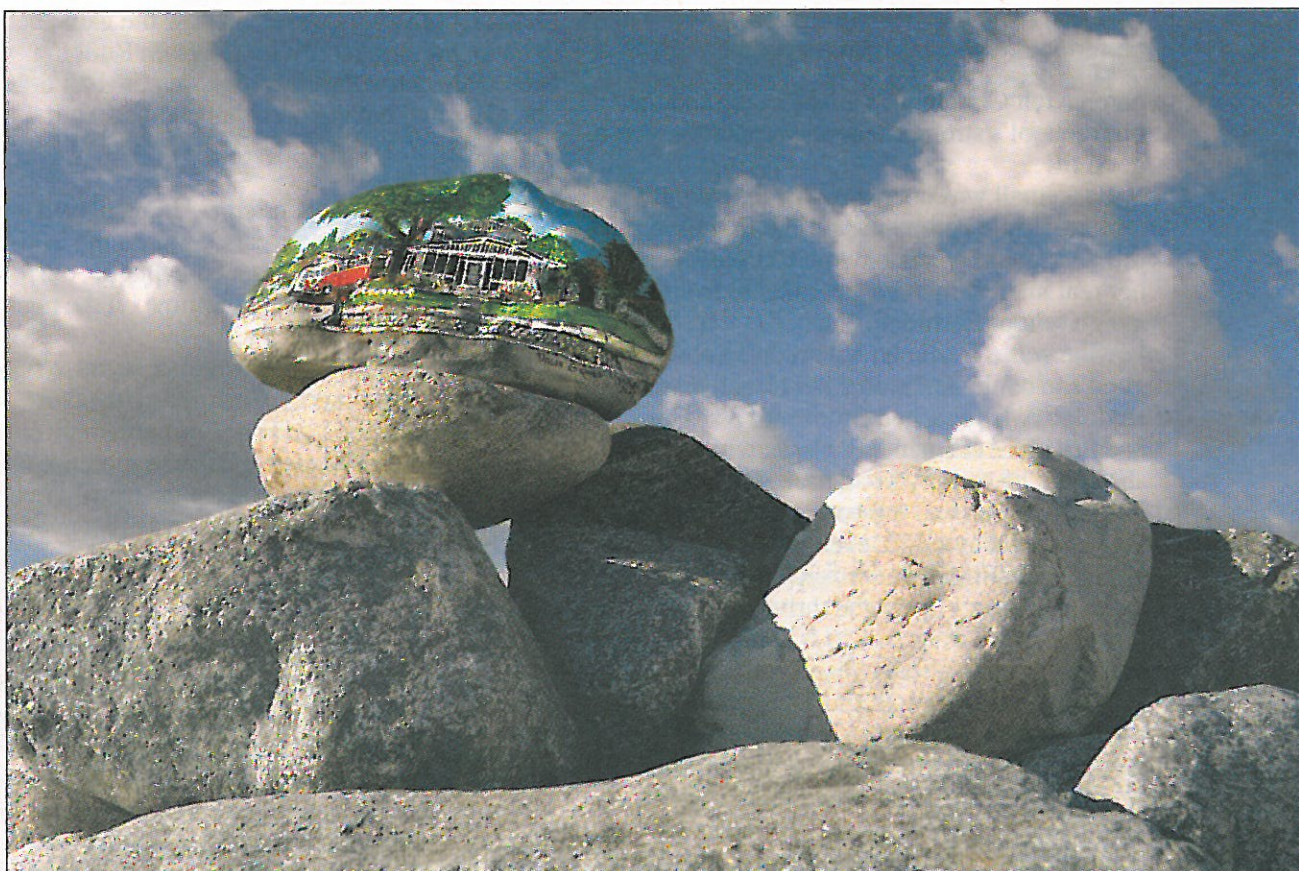
Power forward:
Brandi Brown
is leading the
Pack

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COURIER photos/Gabriel Fenoy

Kramer's Masonry on Foothill in Upland isn't the typical venue for soulful celebration and unrestrained exuberance. But for Claremont artist Dawn Grimes the gritty, earthy expanse is just these things. It is the apex of joy.

"Ahhhhhh, yes!" shouted Ms. Grimes, standing amidst looming piles of rocks, arms outstretched over her head and face tilted skyward. "I love this place. This is beautiful to me. I literally could stay out here with the rocks all day and communicate."

"I go into a Zen state when I come out here. I close my eyes and think, 'the right rock is finding me,' and I just relax."

As she has done hundreds of times before, Ms. Grimes is combing the masonry, searching for her next "canvas." The hunt, the invigorating hunt, is on, because to her sheer delight, she has found her artistic niche. Passionately, giddily, intensely, Ms. Grimes paints in intricate detail, homes, buildings and historical structures on rocks. Though long ago encouraged by a former professor to pursue a career in architecture, Ms. Grimes desired something more tactile, more sensory.

"I like to touch, to feel. How can I combine feeling and touching stuff and painting and architecture," wondered Ms. Grimes, who earned a bachelor's of fine arts from the UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture. "And I found it. I knew it. This is the



Dawn Grimes looks for a suitable rock to paint on at a local quarry. Ms. Grimes uses only rocks that are fitting in size and dimension, those sharing similar proportions to the building she is painting.



Artist Dawn Grimes' workspace inside her Claremont home.

structure I want to paint on."

About a decade ago, Ms. Grimes nestled herself into her tiny den and began painting on really small stones.

"There was never a plan, but I always knew I wanted to be an artist and make my living as an artist," said the 26-year Claremont resident. "Something in me said 'I can do this and I'm not going to hold myself back from it.' What do I have to lose?"

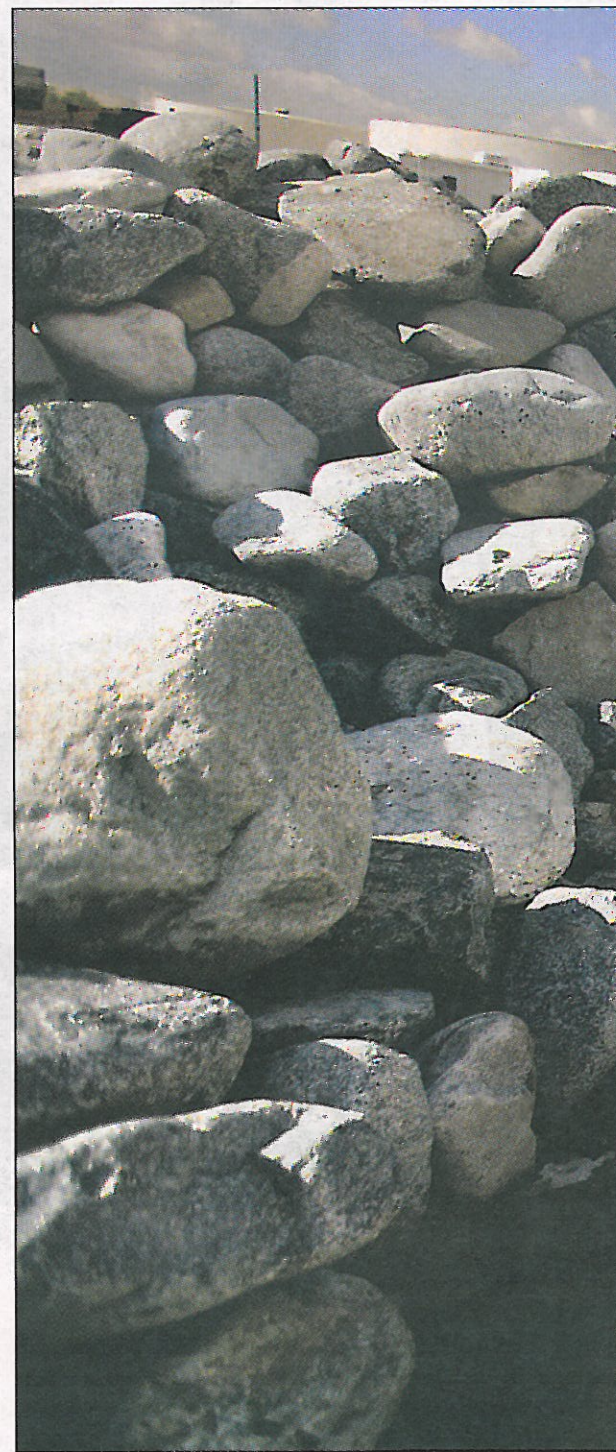
At that time, imagination was her only commissioner, and she invented the structures she immortalized on the rather diminutive rocks. To her surprise and glee, these creations sold out and sold out and sold out at local street fairs. And then, she received her first commission, for which she charged a mere \$12. But the client was so pleased and impressed and realistic about how much effort she invested in the artwork, he gave her \$25 instead.

"I was so happy! Twenty-five dollars!" said Ms. Grimes, jumping up and down on the masonry's muddy ground. "I was so happy. Twenty-five dollars! We're going to dinner!"

From there, people started taking note of her exquisite talent, and a few more commissions rolled in. How fortunate it was for the early clients who were still charged a pittance—\$25—by the budding artist who didn't yet know she had found her life's true path. Now, hundreds of rocks—and a few smashed fingers and broken toes later, Ms. Grimes excitedly works away on almost constant commissions, charging clients \$1,500 for each stunning creation.

"It's so time consuming, if I really thought about how much time I've spent, it's actually much more," Ms. Grimes explained. "But as an artist, you almost

Cast in



want to say 'Here! Thank you for loving it!' But you can't do that if you want to make a life of it.

"It's not the rocks that cost, it's the time and materials and the time and the time and the time."

From the very moment of a new commission, Ms. Grimes is ready and willing—and ecstatic, actually—to invest hours, days, weeks, even months of time for each rock painting. A month and a half is her estimated time frame to take a piece from beginning to end. But on occasion, it takes her this long to find a suitable rock, for its shape must align with the particular structure she will paint upon it.

"It is heartbreaking when I find a perfect rock that ends up not being perfect," said Ms. Grimes, noting that the dominant problem is that a perfectly shaped rock won't stand upright on its own. "I go 'damn,' and walk on by it."

Once the "wow" rock is found, the one precisely suited for the task at hand, she just looks at it for a while, sometimes for a few days.

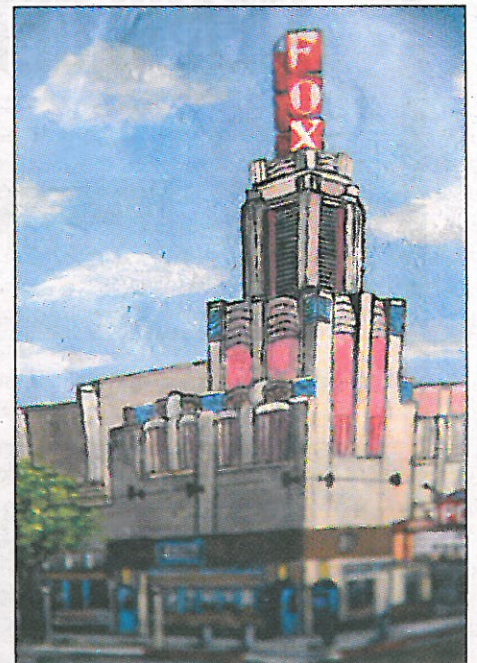
"I come in and out of my studio," she explained, one hand on her hip, the other on her chin, imitating herself in deep reflection, "and just stare at it."

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tone | Claremont artist leaves no rock unturned



COURIER photos/Gabriel Fenoy
Artist Dawn Grimes throws up her arms in ecstasy at the site of rocks at Kramer's Masonry on Foothill Boulevard. Ms. Grimes can spend hours looking for the perfect rock to paint on.



In addition to private residences, Ms. Grimes is often commissioned to paint historical landmarks, like the Pomona Fox Theater pictured here.



Twenty-six-year Claremont resident Dawn Grimes sits inside her home studio where she paints her unique rock creations.

In this way, she is preparing for the first brush stroke, figuring out the best place to begin, which is different every time.

"I paint where I'm led," she said.

Thus far, Ms. Grimes has painted private homes cherished by the owners, such as Sam Maloof's home—her favorite rock to date, she said, which she created for his birthday last year. There have been numerous civic structures, such as Claremont's City Hall and Police Department; local landmarks such as Claremont's Memorial Park and the historic train depot; and many, many more. Uniquely, she once painted a yacht on a rock, which then traveled the world upon the boat it depicted.

Cozy in her small home studio is where Ms. Grimes spends the most time, contentedly laboring to bring even the most infinitesimal detail to stone—it's the whole picture that entices her mind and her brushes, not just

the structure itself. And, in preparation, she takes up to 150 photos of the home or building, from every angle, ensuring she doesn't miss a thing.

"I love including unexpected details that people don't expect me to put in there, like electrical boxes or telephone poles," she explained. "It gives a sense of place."

Looking toward the future, Ms. Grimes is nearly besotted with anticipation over the opportunities—and rocks—that lay before her. She is in her element, embodying the words written in big, shiny, gold letters in her studio: imagination, inspiration, visualization.

"I'm 58 years young, and it's an exciting time of life. I feel so excited about everything right now.

"This life, this career is totally open-ended. There's no limit to what I can paint or what I can paint on. I'm totally

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immersed in this," said Ms. Grimes. "Life is so full for me of stuff I can do with this, and this is an important time for me to do this, so I'm going to take it all the way."

Where that might be, she said, is the White House. Her "big dream" is to paint the historic landmark on

the perfect rock and have it displayed there.

"It blows my mind when I think that's possible, because it is possible! Why not?" she queried.

Certainly, such a work of art would include her signature detail upon it, one that graces each and every rock she finishes: a tiny kite.

"It means fly high and reach for your dreams. It's my symbol, because that's what I'm doing."

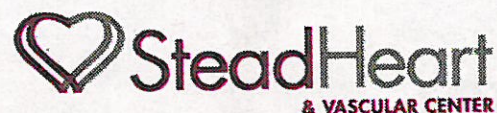
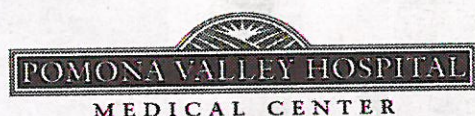
Ms. Grimes lives in Claremont with her husband of 11 years, Michael Myers, a local massage therapist and her best support. "He lugs around the rocks. He is the best."

For more information on Ms. Grimes and her art, visit www.sketchedinstone.com.

—Brenda Bolinger

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