

Willy and Ann Francois
By: Ali Schrott



When stores like Barneys, Nieman Marcus and The Tiny Jewel Box in Washington D.C. are clamoring for your wares, you know you've made it as an artist. Willy and Ann Francois have been handcrafting decoupage works of art for over 25 years. Their work is owned by both US and foreign presidents as well as some celebrities. So what is the secret? What makes this couple's work so collectible? After a quick tour of their Stroudsburg studio I can honestly say it is the love of what they do and the serious nature by which they approach their art. Their standards are high and that is why their products become timeless heirlooms. Every detail is thought out and every inch is an homage to the level of quality, beauty and craftsmanship in which they believe.

Willy was born in France where love and appreciation for beautiful things is a part of the culture. He holds a diploma from the renowned Parisian art school, Ecole Boulle. Boulle, the master furniture maker, created the school as a place of study for all the arts while emphasizing home decor. Ann Sheps Francois graduated from Rutgers University with a Masters in Photography and its relevance to Art Therapy. Willy and Ann met in New Mexico in 1982 and they have been together in art and in life ever since. It was after their move to the Big Apple that Ann and Willy discovered their calling. Ann was working for an Italian art magazine that was around the corner of a renown New York City antique store. Ann had showed them a decoupage box and they put it in their window and sold it instantly. The store owner then commissioned plates and then proceeded to buy everything the couple could make, and their business was born.

It was time to grow, so Willy decided to approach the famous shopping mecca Barneys NYC. The store has helped launch the careers of countless designers and artists, the Francois' are amongst the ranks. Willy stopped in one day to try and set up an appointment with a buyer and was told no one was available, but he could call in an hour. He went across the street and waited at a pay phone and called exactly when the hour was up... it turned out the owner had bought a piece of the Francois' decoupage at the antique store and had actually been looking for the couple. Barneys New York played an integral role in helping the Francois' develop a collection. Ann and Willy applied their new knowledge of the business of art and developed collections for other stores throughout the country.

From a paperweight to a full vanity, every item is created with 'grace and beauty in a classical historical style.' Nothing goes unnoticed in the Francois' work and it has taken them countless years to find the perfect combination of style and craftsmanship. The couple continues to create new collections for major retailers and also specializes in custom work. Willy and Ann Francois are masters of the exacting art of decoupage and their work will be on display this holiday season at The Apple Tree in Downtown Stroudsburg. If you are looking for something truly unique and one-of-a-kind, you must stop in. ■

To view Ann and Willy Francois' work go to www.willanfine.com or phone their studio @ 570.992.9216. The Apple Tree will display the items through December at their store @ 726 Main Street in Downtown Stroudsburg or phone 570.421.2798 for more information.



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