

# Stuff hand-picks area artwork

## *Artists find hot commodity in Brookside specialty store*

By Bridget Heos

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Each year, 125 to 150 artists apply to have Stuff in Brookside carry their arts and crafts. Only three or four get accepted.

Artists who make the cut say they are thankful to have a local partner marketing and selling their goods.

Stuff began when sisters and store owners Casey and Sloane Simmons opened a West Plaza gallery eight years ago. That evolved into a Westport shop and finally a larger space at 316 W. 63rd St. in Brookside.

There, the store carries 60 to 80 regional artists, 60 to 80 national artists and 100 other products. Artists replenish their art as it sells.

"It's the hardest way to run a company, my sister and I found out, but we think it's the best," Casey Simmons says.

She says the name Stuff was conceived at a dining-room table.

"It's just stuff that people love and enjoy. It doesn't have to make a statement," she says. "We didn't want a name that sounded chichi."

The Simmons, artists themselves, wanted to provide a venue for art that didn't necessarily fit the gallery mold.

Simmons calls it "functional, wearable, funky art," and it includes jewelry, denim,

painted lawn chairs and multimedia art.

"There's creativity in every part of our life," Casey Simmons says. "The way I drink my coffee. The denim I have. Everything we choose is really a reflection of our personality."

For artists, being in the store means they don't have to sell out of their studios or travel to as many art shows.

"More creative time, less business time — that's the goal," says Chris Dahlquist of Brookside, who does photographic emulsion transfers onto aluminum and copper. "And that's really what Stuff frees me up to do."

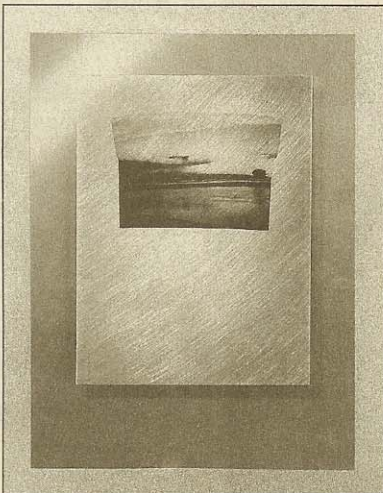
With the owners' letter of recommendation, she recently was accepted into her first wholesale art show, where shops throughout the country buy from artists.

Lori Buntin paints vibrant

landscapes and metal chairs. She began creating paintings that incorporate paint-by-number canvasses.

"What's great about working with Stuff is they give you free rein to bring in what you want," she says. "They don't try to guide you or censor you in any way."

Katie Marlo, who has displayed her work in Stuff since 2001, says her jewelry and embellished



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

"San Francisco Fog" photo emulsion on aluminum.



BRIDGET HEOS/Dispatch Tribune

Chris Dahlquist, an artist whose work is carried by Stuff in Brookside, recently won a merit award as a first-time participant in the Philadelphia Buyers Market of American Craft. Niche, a magazine owned by the same company, nominated Stuff for the list of top-100 retailers of American craft.

home goods sell fast in the store because of the store's sales staff and creative design.

"It's become a pretty exclusive place to be now," she says. "The word of mouth has spread so greatly that more artists

want to be in there."

Simmons says turning artists down is hard.

"We've turned down artists I think are phenomenal," she says, "but it's not right at that time."