

Clementine Hunter ceramics collection gets nod from Oprah

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If you're a fan of Clementine Hunter and artistic serving dishes, you have something in common with Oprah Winfrey this year.

The talk show icon listed a serving piece that features Hunter's famous "Baptism on Cane River" painting among her favorite things in the December issue of "O Magazine."

The hand-painted and hand-molded ceramic platter is one of nine three-dimensional dishes in the Clementine

Hunter Collection available through Gitter Gallery.

Doug Gitter, gallery creator and designer of the collection, is a New Orleans native but has ties to Alexandria, where wife Cathy graduated from Bolton High School.

He spent time in Alexandria recently to talk with customers at John Ward Interiors & Gifts, which carries the line. Clint Ward, owner of the Alexandria store, said the collection has been popular, especially in this area.

"People recognize her work," Ward said of Hunter. "It's Louisiana, it's Central Louisiana."

Gitter started work on line years ago, after decades as a personal collector of self-taught contemporary Southern artists.

"I think Clementine Hunter is one of the most famous self-taught contemporary Southern artists, and I love what (she) was able to capture," he said. "She captured for our country what no one else was able to."

He's referring to what Hunter saw during her life that spanned one century to the next. She lived long enough to see the end of slav-

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Doug Gitter, owner of Gitter Gallery, designed the Clementine Hunter Collection of hand-painted ceramic serving platters and bowls. He attended a "meet the designer" event recently at John Ward Interiors & Gifts on Metro Drive in Alexandria. MELINDA MARTINEZ/MMARTINEZ@THETOWNTALK.COM

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People take part in a group exercise during a laughter yoga class June 9 in St. Albans, England. A panel assembled by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences recommended that federal statistics and surveys include a few extra questions on happiness. MATT DUNHAM/AP

Happy

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European countries, Canada, Israel and Mexico. The United States ranked 17th in a world happiness ranking report directed by Helliwell, which came out in September.

Money isn't everything

When governments and academics study happiness, they find that money isn't everything. Many of the richest countries, including the United States, weren't in the top 10 in self-reported happiness in the report.

"Having no money is terrible for everything," Graham said. But after people make "a comfortable amount of money," it doesn't add too much to happiness, she said.

That's what a study last week in the journal PLoS One found. It found that as people made more money

worldwide they got happier — but only to a point. That point is just shy of \$36,000 a year per person, or \$144,000 for a family of four.

Once people reached that point, happiness measurements level off and even go down ever so slightly, said study lead author, Eugenio Proto, an economist at the University of Warwick. According to the study, in general, people in the U.S. passed that "bliss point" a few years ago; however, federal income figures don't show nearly that high a household wealth level.

Ceramics

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ery — something she knew too well — and the mechanization of agriculture.

"She worked the cotton fields and painted about what that life was like," Gitter said. "She painted about the everyday life of the rural South.... She captured a piece of American history she experienced in her own lifetime and also watched vanish."

Hunter's popularity has grown, reaching far beyond her home in Natchitoches Parish.

"I wanted to take artwork that was once very affordable and make it affordable again," he said.

The collection took time to create and came with its own problems and questions — like how one conveys a two-dimensional painting onto a ceramic platter. He began with two-dimensional plates, but said they looked more like decals than representations of Hunter's work.

These 3-D ceramics require hand-molding and "a tremendous amount of work" in making sure the



A dish in the Clementine Hunter Collection was featured in "Oprah's Favorite Things" for 2013 for 2013. COURTESY PHOTO

colors, faces, hat brims and other details are just like Hunter's original. The textured surface of the plates make the colors pop and add relief to the work.

"I wanted people to feel the movement (of Hunter's work)," Gitter said.

The extra work adds a special touch to the collection, as no two pieces are exactly alike even when

representing the same painting, he said.

"The reason I love this stuff is because it's from the heart," he said. "(Hunter) was just expressing her own emotions of life."

Having one of his pieces selected as "Oprah's Favorite Things" for 2013 was an unexpected Christmas present.

The "Baptism on Cane

River" platter is pictured both with Winfrey and on its own in the multiple-page spread of her holiday wish list. It is featured among Candy Crush earrings, Beats by Dre headphones and iPhone cases that simultaneously charge them.

Gitter called it an honor to be listed among such notable and popular brands.

"To be on that level is the ultimate achievement," he said.

The Clementine Hunter Collection's nine styles — that includes "Zinnias Looking at You" and "Cotton Picking" — are marked with Hunter's signature and comes in a Tiffany blue gift box. They are microwave-safe and FDA-approved.

The collection is available at John Ward Interiors & Gifts in Alexandria, stores across Louisiana and beyond and online at www.gittergallery.com.

With each purchase, a percentage of the proceeds goes to Hunter's estate to further promote her life and art.

Gitter represents 10 self-taught artists, whose work can be found at his website as well.

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