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FLK 399

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Plastic Canvas Crafts

Plastic canvas crafts are part of both the performance and material folklore genres. The process of learning how to do the crafts through oral and visual instructions identifies the craft as performance folklore, but the finished product becomes material folklore. Plastic canvas crafts are created with three basic materials: the plastic canvas (cut to the desired size), yarn (or embroidery floss if you are making smaller items like earrings), and a special rounded-tip needle with a larger eye so the yarn will fit through it easier. Two examples of plastic canvas crafts that I viewed are a refrigerator magnet and a tissue holder that my stepmother, Joyce Bower, had made.



Refrigerator magnet



Tissue holder

The refrigerator magnet consists of a 5x10 piece of plastic canvas with white yarn inserted into every hole on the canvas to create the base. Purple, pink, yellow, and blue yarns are

inserted over the white base to create the flowers. Black yarn is used to create the border of the magnet and the inscription “If mothers were flowers I’d pick you!” Two magnet strips are glued to the back of the canvas to complete the craft.

The tissue holder, shaped like a well, consists of five equal squares of plastic canvas with gray and red yarn that create a brick pattern for the bottom and four sides. These pieces are connected together with red yarn. One detachable square of plastic canvas with all gray yarn creates the top. A hole is cut out in the center of this square to allow access to the tissues placed within it. Two squares of plastic canvas with all brown yarn, connected together with brown yarn, create the roof. The roof is connected to the base of the tissue well with two smaller pieces of plastic canvas with brown yarn. The top connection uses brown yarn, and the bottom connection uses red yarn. The tissue holder is embellished with foliage glued to two of the sides for aesthetic purposes.

I viewed these two pieces of plastic canvas crafts at the home of my dad and stepmom, Larry and Joyce Bower. Both pieces serve practical purposes. Joyce states that she originally created the refrigerator magnet for her mother a few years ago for Mother’s Day. She remarks that she received it back after her mother passed away a few months ago. Anyone sitting at the kitchen table can see that it now holds up some of their grandchildren’s artwork on the side of the refrigerator. Although I moved the tissue holder to the kitchen table to take a photograph, it is actually kept on a table in the living room, so my dad and stepmom can have easier access to the tissues while in that room.

Joyce informs that she learned how to work with plastic canvas from her mother, Nedra Hoover, about twenty years ago during one of her mother’s visits to her house in Eastern Kentucky. Joyce states that her mother always showed her how to do every new craft that she

had learned during her visits. Creating plastic canvas crafts is her favorite hobby because it keeps her active and creates a variety of items that have practical uses. She says that the amount of time required to create one of these crafts depends on the size of the project. A magnet can be finished in one day, but a tissue holder can take up to four days to complete.

I believe that the plastic canvas crafts created by my stepmother allow her to express her artistic talents in relatively inexpensive ways. These crafts can easily be created on a small budget, and the completed crafts serve practical purposes. While the craft of working with plastic canvas was passed down by her mother, Joyce now creates these items because making the items herself is cheaper than buying similar items at the store. In addition to the monetary savings, the time and love she places into the plastic canvas crafts that she creates as gifts for family members strengthens familial bonds. I think that making a unique item for someone shows more love and care than buying a mass-produced item from the store, so these crafts reveal one specific way that my stepmom expresses her love and affection.