

Islamic law prohibits the use of figurative art or portraits in designs. Therefore, Arabic calligraphy, intricate tiles, layered patterns and detailed architectural elements flourish in many Muslim countries.

For decorative artist Heather Bruno-Sears, there's one thing better than studying those layers of textures — leaving behind her own mark in one such architectural effort.

Skaneateles resident Bruno-Sears was among a group of 10 women who traveled to Marrakech, Morocco, to work on a home in the Moroccan countryside.

California artist Melanie Royals organized the trip to her friend's estate. Her friend Maryam Montague and her family bought a nine-acre olive orchard just outside Marrakech. That acreage is the site of a main home and three guest homes, all in progress. The estate, called Peacock Pavilion, has undergone construction for the past two years, and has about one more year to go. The family plans to open it up to visitors upon completion.

Besides organizing the work trip, Royals designed the four major projects the 10 artists worked on in the home.

The team helped make Royals' designs reality. Working together, they changed the concrete floors of the family's children's rooms into ornamental floors with a maze surrounded by inspirational quotes, and the other became a lace pattern.

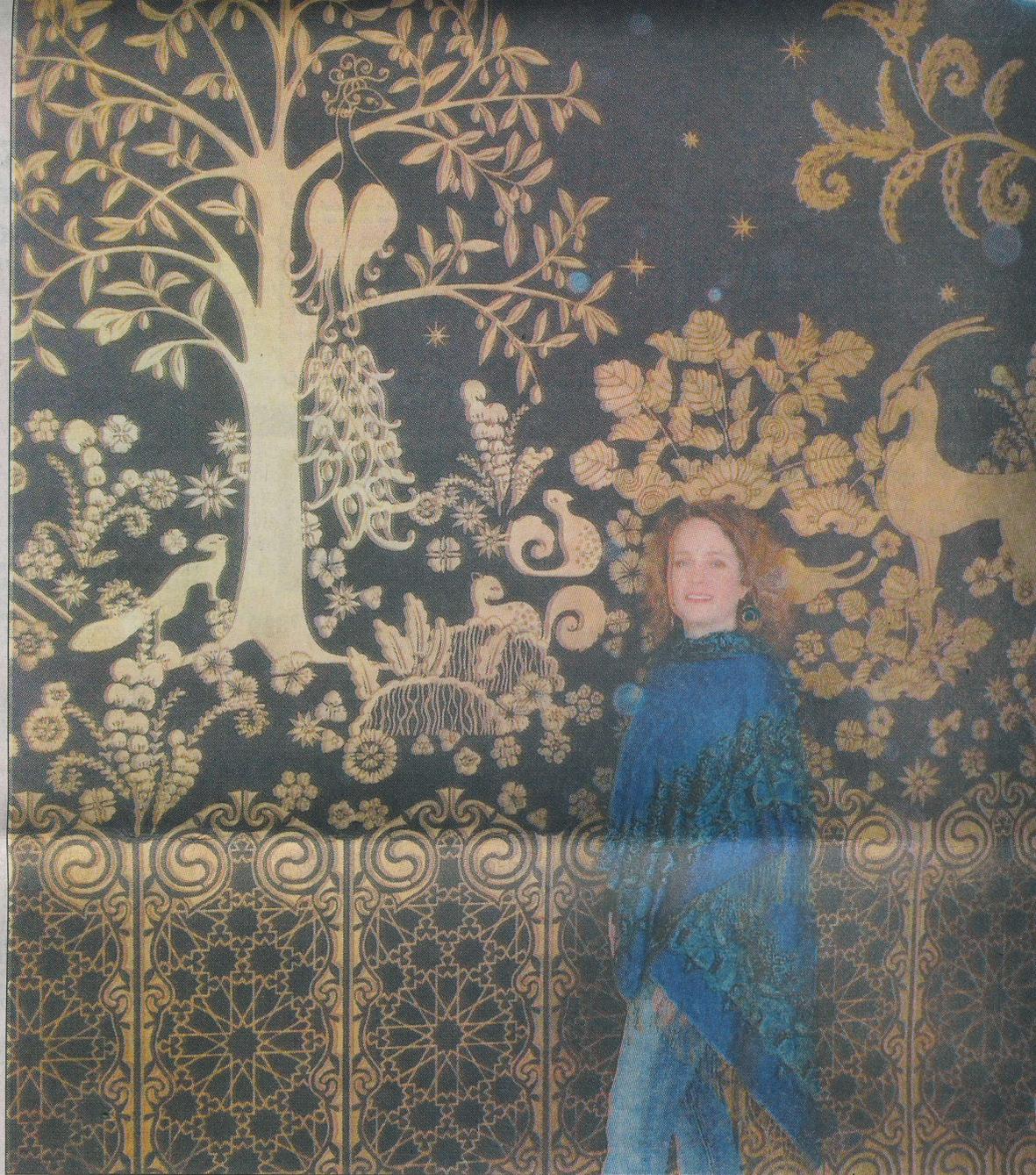
Besides those floors, the women worked on stair risers and a gold-on-black mural that was inspired by an Art Deco tapestry. The stair risers included all different black and white patterns in Moroccan-style textures.

"We rotated day by day so we each had a hand in each of the projects," she said.

Bruno-Sears met Royals through a course in San Diego a year ago. Royals often goes on painting adventures around the world, and decided to go to Montague's home in progress.

The women are designers from across the country and have met Royals through similar workshops or through working together on projects.

"When you surrounding yourself with people like that, you get inspired. You're trying to evolve as an artist and learn something new every year and come up with new ideas back home," Bruno-Sears said.



Heather Bruno-Sears stands before a mural she helped create, along with nine other decorative painters, last month in a home in Morocco. Photo provided by Heather Bruno-Sears

Besides working at the estate, they were able to experience the local culture. They visited a 16th century palace, drove through the desert, and visited a nearby marketplace — complete with snake charmers. Bruno-Sears was nervous about going to the country because she didn't know what to expect, but knew it would prove to be an experience of a lifetime.

"I was just awestruck by the beauty and the exotic nature of the land," she said.

She came back from those 10 days with 900 photos, new friendships and countless ideas to incorporate into her work in central New York.

"The absolute elaborate ornament was everywhere, the ceiling, the floors, the doors. The architecture was so layered and layered and layered with ornamental detailing and painting and the plaster work. These are things that I do here at home on such a smaller scale," she said. "I'll never look at a door the same way again."

LEARN MORE

Visit the Web sites:

- Heather Bruno-Sears
www.heatherbrunosears.com
- Melanie Royals:
www.designamour.com
- Maryam Montague www.mymarakesh.com