SPOTLIGHT

Colorado Critters

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For a fee of up to 1,000, artist will immortalize your pet

By Rebecca Jones

t**om** mountain News Staff writer

DGEWATER — Artist DeDe LaRue looks in the face of her collie, Lassie, and sees a saint. The Virgin Mary, actually.

Lassie was the inspiration for one of LaRue's first animal sculptures, Virgin Mary Lassie, a whimsical depiction of a wimpled collie, rosary

It's part of LaRue's *Dogma* series. The piece retains a permanent place of honor by her fireplace. When the day comes, she may use it to inter Lassie's ashés.

"You know, it just personifies how I feel about dogs," says LaRue, part-time groomer and full-time artist, whose fanciful animal creations have been tickling Denverites for years. 'All these traits that we idolize in the saints — loyalty, devotion, compassion — dogs

personify."

LaRue is well-known for her animal art, starting from the days when she decorated dumpsters with her trademark flamingos. But less known is this: LaRue has a thriving business doing commissioned sculptures of people's pets — their "little loved ones," as she calls

Fora fee — \$325 fora small dog or cat up to \$1,000 or more for a large animal — LaRue will immortalize your pet in papier-mache.

She'll make it arty and bizarre, or she'll make it so true to life it will

confuse the neighbors.

"I love it! Are you kidding?" proclaims Janis Moore, of Denver, who could imagine nothing finer than to

own a life-size sculpture of her fox terrier, Sabrina. She's had the artwork about two years now

"I have people sit in my house, and start petting it," she says. "I get a big laugh when people reach down to touch my fake dog!"

Equally pleased was KUSA-Channel 9 newsman Ed Sardella, when his wife, Sandy, gave him LaRue sculptures of their cat, Pete, and golden retriever, Floyd, one Christmas.

"They're very similar likeness-es," Sardella says. "Floyd has a tendency to pick up the cat's toys and play with them himself — even though we tell him not to — and there was this one that was his favorite. In the sculpture, it's hanging out of his mouth."

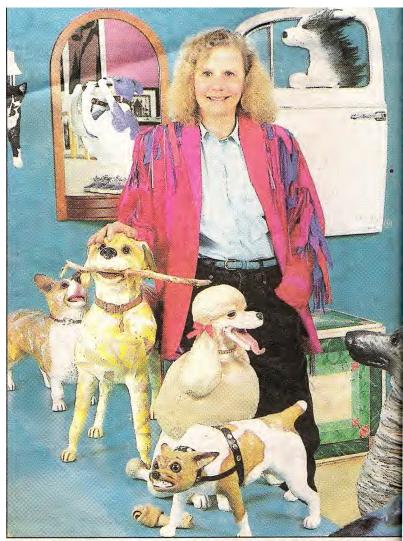
If people love LaRue's works, animals are less sure about them.

"It's interesting how animals respond," LaRue says. "Dogs will run up to these sculptures and try to sniff them. They get so confused. Their eyes are telling them it's a dog but their nose is telling them it's not a dog."

She recalls two cats who reside in an art gallery to which she brought two of her animal creations, a stalking wolf and a merdachsund (a cross between a mermaid and a dog). "The one cat kept hissing at the stalking wolf. And the other cat fell asleep in the curve of the mer-dachsund's tail. I find it flattering that animals react to my pieces. It tells me that I'm accurate."

Downstairs in LaRue's house is her studio, a haphazard collection of animal parts, plastic flowers and ideas. She's now in her mounted trophy-head phase, substituting fake flowers for the fur of bears, mountain goats and other hunted

A self-taught artist, LaRue turns out 50-75 pieces a year.





Steeve Groen/Rocky Mountain Me

Sculptor DeDe LaRue, top photo, with some d her pet creations (abov and left). Left photo,,, Outback, an Australian cattle dog, is on the right. Her likeness is or the left.

t of art nas — now snail I put this? — a limited appeal," LaRue says. "A lot of people are afraid of art galleries. They think art is for the elite, which isn't true."

She hopes her animals draw people into art in ways more serious art

"There's a lot of deep meaning in a lot of my art. It's there if people

want to find she says. but it they don't, if they just appreciate on a simpler level, that's there too People don't have to worry about not getting it."

An exhibit of LaRue 's animal artwork is on display through the end of the month at the Art of Craft, 1736 Wazee St. For information on commissioning piece, call LaRue, 239-8202.