

100-MILE ARTS & CRAFTS

Paper plate lady

Joelle Meijer crafts disposable dinnerware into quirky puppets, 3D animals to teach kids about protecting the planet

BY JANET WILSON

Most of us use paper plates when eating hot dogs or cake. But for Joelle Meijer, the disposable dinnerware is her canvas for visual arts projects. Using paper bowls,

plates and oval platters, the Ottawa artist has created more than 200 designs, including masks, 3D animals, pirate ships, colourful puppets and decorations for Halloween and Christmas.

Meijer's website,

animaplates.com, features 50 projects with step-by-step instructions and a list of necessary supplies. For \$19.95, members register for one year and receive two projects a month.

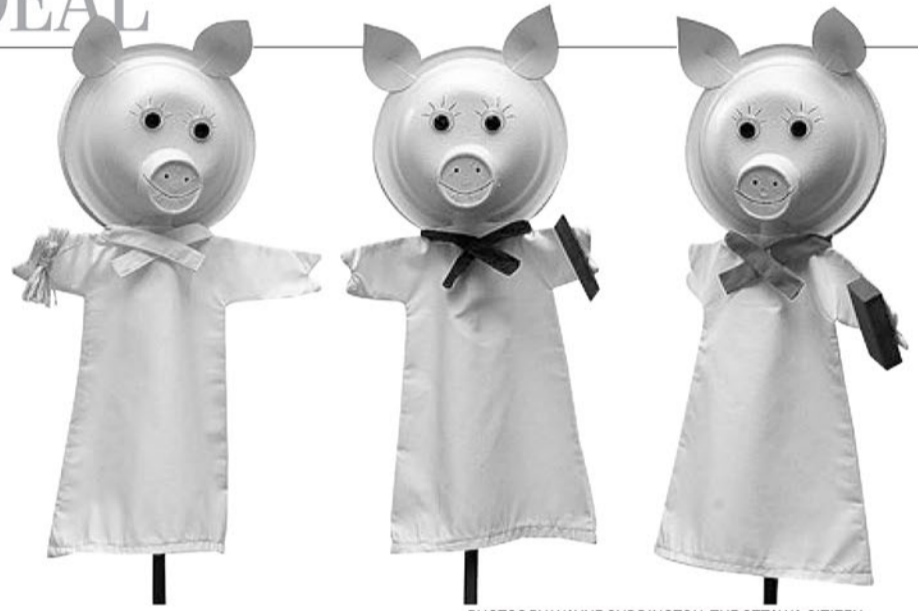
See CRAFTS on PAGE E2



WAYNE CUDDINGTON, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Using paper plates, fabric and paint, Joelle Meijer makes puppets to use as teaching tools. 'Kids learn more through art. I love the result.'

REAL DEAL



PHOTOS BY WAYNE CUDDINGTON, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Crafts: Learning through art

Continued from PAGE E1

A handy menu offers links to various categories in Meijer's catalogue. Click on a picture to see a detailed description of a project, illustrated explanations, teaching resources and instructions that include the level of difficulty. Children can make tropical fish, animal faces, a bird's nest, piggy banks, a complete chess set, Christmas ornaments and spaceships.

Meijer's puppets, which sport googly eyes and tufts of artificial hair, include members of the *Star Trek* crew, the Three Little Pigs, Grandma and the Big Bad Wolf and a reindeer, lion, chick and dog.

"I buy paper plates by the thousand. Every time I go for a walk and see something interesting, an idea starts building up in my head in 3D."



Meijer, who came to Canada from Belgium in 1980, became hooked on paper plate art more than 24 years ago as a way to reach out to her young son who did not speak.

"When my son was young, CHEO suggested that I babysit children as a way for him to interact with others. I had five kids for 10 hours so I had to keep them busy with music, crafts and art projects."

Meijer's first project was turning a paper plate into the face of a pig. Then it was a mouse and a monkey. Soon friends were telling her to publish her ideas.

"I approached three publishing companies and was called right away. I wrote three books in French from 1986 to 1988. After 20 years, my contract is over and I'm now on my own."

Meijer was a visual arts and science teacher for 10 years before staying home to raise her two children. In 1998, she took a multimedia course at La Cité collégiale and began working on websites a year later.

Through her company, Artiztix Multimedia Inc., Meijer creates custom websites and multimedia presentations. She's also developed a talking educational game for children (three to eight) called Match it! (artiztix.com)

Through her paper plate art, Meijer integrates topics such as drama, science, language arts and the environment. Many of her puppets carry subtle messages about observing nature and protecting the planet and endangered species.

"Teachers get their students to make a puppet, memorize text and then present a puppet play. Kids learn more through art. I love the result."

For the past three years, Meijer has been teaching her crafty designs at summer camps. Her goal is to inspire kids to be creative and have fun.

From bats to wizards, witches and broomsticks, she's gearing up for Halloween and is busy designing new pumpkin faces.

"I'm constantly told that I don't charge very much for what I do. But I'm giving the gift of learning. I want people to be able to afford this."

