Artist's range limited only by her imagination

By RISA ROBERT

Della Storms, at age 57, doesn't fit into many stereotypical categories.

But that's okay, because Storms - an artist with no formal training - dislikes stereotypes, calling them "boxes" into which people enclose themselves and others.

The subject range of the paintings she and her students create reflects that attitude - a range limited only by imagination.

When Storms prepares to do a painting, no matter what the subject, she has to experience it and learn as much about it as possible before putting brush to canvas.

"When I'm commissioned, I have to get acquainted with the building," Storms said. "I ran my hand over an entire building once, without lifting it."

Storms' renditions of the Old State Capitol, the new Capitol and Houmas House hang in the office of the Baton Rouge Area Convention and Tourism Bureau. The bureau, as a result, commissioned her to design its Christmas card this year.

She did, and her oil painting of a large green wreath beribboned in red, with the Baton Rouge skyline in gold winding behind it toward the bureau's logo, was transformed into cards that wished at least 600 people well this Christmas season.

Storms takes her time to get things right. She's nothing if not thorough, but she's had to be.

She has managed to earn her living, and support four children, through 20 years of painting and teaching - not a small task.

"To have raised a family by just teaching art is more or less a miracle," Storms, who's been divorced 22 years, said. But she downplays the talent which allowed her to pay the bills.

"Talent is never for you. It's always for other people," said the energetic woman, whose faded red hair gives testament to the vibrancy of her youth.

"Some artists choose to be artists, while others are chosen," she said. She believes she was chosen, since she never set out to be an artist.

Storms is a woman of strong faith, and attributes her success to the Lord. Her faith shines through in her work, which never strays to what she calls the "dark side." Her depiction of a magnolia nailed to a cross illustrates the blending of her creativity and faith.

The painting's black background reflects the sin of man, which can be shown flowing onto the magnolia - representative of Jesus taking on man's sin.

"Jesus isn't dead in this picture," she explained. The gold part of the flower represents life.

Magnolias have always been special to her, she said, and another example of that is a painting of a large, vivid magnolia in full bloom hanging in her living room.

But that magnolia, the undersides of which are tinged blood-red, is also a unique version of the famed flower. Unnoticed on the first glance - it actually has to be pointed out - is the yellow sac in the center of the flower, which contains a fetus. Storms painted the magnolia during the height of the abortion controversy.

"I just wanted to express the magnolia in any way it flowed,"
she said. That’s what she does with all her subjects, though the results are not usually quite so dramatic.

Her first print — a print of a painting she did of her granddaughter near an outside table — will be released in January.

Storms said she has worked hard to get where she is.

“I’m glad to know who I am and where I’m going now,” she said. “If I had it to do over, I’d want to know the purpose of my life at a younger age. My season is a late season, because of the decisions I’ve made.

“Life is so simple. It’s man that makes it complicated.”