



Roads Scholar

Educational Adventures in Our Own Backyard

By Kathleen Williams
CRIZMAC Art and Cultural Marketplace

DeGrazia's Gallery in the Sun is a Monument to the Artist—and the Land He Loved



As a child growing up in the mining town of Morenci, Arizona, Ettore “Ted” DeGrazia would scrape the turquoise-colored ore from rocks in the mine dumps and use it to paint pictures. He also drew with charcoal and used flower petals, leaves and cactus fruit in his art.

DeGrazia was born in 1909, the son of Italian immigrants. His father worked in a copper mine and his mother took care of the family. The family went back to Italy for a few years when DeGrazia was a child. When they returned to Arizona, he had to learn English all over again so he didn't graduate from high school until he was 23. He then moved to Tucson to attend the University of Arizona. DeGrazia had a passion for both art and music. He studied art and education in college, and played music in a dance band to earn money.

DeGrazia's artwork was first published by Arizona Highways in 1941, after which he traveled to Mexico and worked with the famous Mexican muralists, Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco. The Mexican artists praised his work and sponsored an exhibition of his paintings at Mexico City's renowned *Palacio de Bellas Artes*. Encouraged, DeGrazia returned to Arizona but was disappointed to find that no one wanted to buy his artwork. He decided to build his own gallery so he would have a place to show his paintings and sculptures. First, he built the Mission in the Sun in 1952. It was built in honor of Padre Kino and dedicated to our Lady of Guadalupe. The bright, sunny building has DeGrazia murals on the walls and a roof that is open to the sky. DeGrazia had to haul all of the materials used in the construction, including the water, to the site in his car. He built the Mission, as well as the subsequent buildings, with the help of his Native American and Mexican friends using traditional adobe bricks crafted on-site with what he termed “sun, sand, and sweat.” They also incorporated many other natural or recycled materials into the construction, including rocks, cactus skeletons, and wooden beams from old mine shafts. The Gallery was completed a few years later in 1965.

De Grazia became famous worldwide when UNICEF selected one of his paintings, *Los Niños*, to be on their greeting cards. Soon many people were interested in his paintings of Native American and Mexican children, angels, horses, and desert scenes. A prolific artist, DeGrazia created watercolors, oils, sketches, ceramics, jewelry and sculptures before his death from cancer in 1982 at the age of 73.

Today the gallery houses six permanent collections of paintings that commemorate historical events and native cultures of the Southwest. In addition, you can explore the unique buildings that the artist designed and built. They serve as a monument to DeGrazia's vision and love for his desert home.

DeGrazia is buried just outside of his Mission in the Sun. The grave is covered with many beautiful rocks with copper ore on them. They are the same kind of rocks that the artist used to scrape the ore from to paint with as a child.

Tune Up Your Mind

Look for these books and related resources

DeGrazia Documentary (video by KUAT-TV, 1976)

Little Apache Dancer by Ted DeGrazia (DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun, 1976)

Color Fun (Coloring book by DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun, 1983, reprinted 1998)

The Fine Art of the Tin Can by Bobby Hanson (Lark Books, 2004)

Awesome Things to Make with Recycled Stuff by Heather Smith with Joe Rhatigan (Lark Books, 2003)

Nature's Art Box by Laura C. Martin (Storey Publishing, 2003)

Details

What: DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun

Where: 6300 North Swan

When: Daily, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Admission: Free

Information: 299-9191 or www.degrazia.org

Discovery Detours

If you go...

Ted DeGrazia used many natural and recycled materials in the construction and decoration of his gallery, as well as in his artwork. As you wander through the buildings he designed and created, and view his works of art, see if you can find examples of the following:

- A floor made using cholla cactus skeletons
- A ceramic bowl made from a mold of the tip of a saguaro cactus arm.
- A bracelet made from gold the artist panned and turquoise that he found
- Flowers made from soda cans and sheet metal
- Decorations made using toilet floats
- Walls made of mud and straw
- Mining picks that have been incorporated into a table
- Ceramics glazed in a turquoise color made from copper ore
- Window shutters made of ocotillo skeletons and saguaro ribs
- Doors that were patterned after ones used in a Yuma prison.

Make a Clay Fossil

The technique you will use for making a clay fossil is very similar to what DeGrazia did to create his saguaro bowls.

Materials:

Old sheet or towel
White polymer clay (like Sculpey)
Plastic wrap
Rolling pin
Leaf, shell, or cone—any object that will leave a good impression
Tweezers, if needed
Plastic knife
Baking sheet
Aluminum foil
Paintbrush and clear polymer clay glaze (optional)

Directions:

1. Make sure an adult is available to help you. Cover your work area with a sheet or towel. Preheat the oven to 275 degrees.
2. Put the clay between pieces of plastic wrap and roll it out flat to about ¼" thick.
3. Remove the top piece of plastic wrap and firmly press your treasure into the clay. Put the plastic wrap back on top and use the rolling pin to gently flatten the clay.
4. Remove the treasure from the clay, using tweezers, if necessary. Use the knife to cut the clay to the desired size and shape.
5. Place the clay on a baking sheet that has been lined with foil. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes or until hard.
6. Remove from the oven and cool. When the piece is cool, paint it with polymer glaze if desired.

Don't stop here. Look for other natural materials or interesting items around your house that you might use for some creative, new purpose.

Source: *Nature's Art Box* by Laura C. Martin (Storey Publishing, 2003)

Think Tank

Discussion questions for the whole family to consider:

Adobe bricks are an ideal building material in the desert because they soak up the sun's heat during the day and release it during the cooler nights. In other parts of the country that have very different climates, people have identified other building materials that are useful for their particular needs. Remember that a natural building material must be something that is found nearby *and* it must provide effective protection against the elements. What are some of the natural materials used by people in other parts of the country—and the world? In what ways are these materials suited to the particular environments in which they are used?

Fuel for Thought

Did you know...

A “Renaissance man” (or woman) is someone with a wide range of interests and skills in many areas. Ted DeGrazia has been called a Renaissance man. The most famous Renaissance man—Leonardo Da Vinci—actually lived during the renaissance. Can you think of anyone else—famous or not—who you might describe in this way?

Wheels Are Turning

Parents and Caregivers: These activities can help your child meet Arizona’s educational standards. The standards addressed here include:

3SC-R1. Distinguish between natural and man-made materials (K)

3SS-F2. Identify natural and human characteristics of places and how people interact with and modify their environments (Grades 1-3)

3SC-E3. Identify a specific need and propose a solution or product that addresses this need, taking into consideration various factors (Grades 4-5)