Ideas keep rolling for mobile artist

By Pamela Powers  
Menomonie News Bureau

MENOMONIE — Mali Mattson never plans what her handmade mobiles will look like before she makes them. Instead, she waits for inspiration of some sort before constructing the items.

Judging by the finished product, Mattson isn't at a loss for finding inspiration. Last year her work was named Best of Show at the Mabel Tainter Fine Arts and Crafts Faire.

Mattson's creations and those of more than 40 other artists will be included in the 11th annual fair Friday and Saturday. "People often call them whimsical," Mattson said of her mobiles. "They are bright. To me, I relate to the fascination we have with movement akin to fish tanks or watching a fire."

Mattson's mobiles, constructed from wire and handmade paper, move with nearby air currents.

Mattson started making mobiles in 2001 after former UW-Stout instructor Rob Wilson taught her mobiles could be made of anything as long as the items balanced each other.
Her first project was a mobile made of origami paper cranes, but Mattson's mobiles have evolved and now often resemble such items as leaves, vines or even pea tendrils.

"I don't preconceive the shape," said Mattson, who works at her home studio, named Gushing Spring Studios to represent the well of inspiration. "I get the metal and the pliers in my hand, and I just start working."

After shaping the wire and soldering it in place, Mattson uses glue to attach paper to the shapes. The paper is made of a variety of materials such as rice or cotton. Nearly all of the paper Mattson uses is handcrafted by other artists.

The finished products usually measure about 3 feet by 3 feet and cost $100 to $300 apiece.

Mame Gale of Menomonie has one of Mattson's mobiles by her kitchen window. "I just smile every time I look at it," Gale said. "It is so whimsical. It just is a true work of art. I just love the detail in the metal work."

In addition to the art fair, Mattson's work is on display at the Bnox Gallery in Pepin.

Mattson, who graduated from UW-Stout in 1999 with a bachelor's degree in fine arts, also is a massage therapist at Red Cedar Chiropractic in Menomonie.

In the future, Mattson plans to create mobiles that can be hung outside or on a porch. To do that, she needs to find materials durable enough to withstand outdoor elements. Mattson also hopes to expand her artwork by creating handmade jewelry.

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If You Go

What: Mabel Tainter Fine Arts and Crafts Faire, with original work by more than 40 artists.

When: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday.

Where: Mabel Tainter Center for the Arts, 205 Main St., Menomonie.

Cost: $3 per person.