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Artist's work to be unveiled Sunday

By **MARY PAT HOAG**

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MADISON — Official portraits exist of soldiers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, but none for the other members of the 1804-06 expedition they led through the Louisiana Territory.

That was one of the challenges faced by Kristy Stark Knapp, a professional artist from Madison, who was commissioned to paint a mural of the Lewis & Clark Expedition at the Madison County Museum here.

In hiring her for the project that would cover a major portion of the north wall of the museum's new building, Knapp said the county's historical society had several requests. One was to include five prominent members of the expedition party.

In addition to Lewis and Clark, Knapp is featuring York, Clark's African-American male servant; Sacajawea, the Shoshone American Indian who was an interpreter; her French-Canadian fur trapper husband, Toussaint Charbonneau; and Lewis' Newfoundland dog named Seaman.

"This has been an extremely challenging project for me, not only artistically but also historically, trying to get things portrayed as accurately as possible," she said.

Knapp said she researched the subjects and then painted them "as I perceived them to be."

The remainder of the mural, which measures 8 feet high and more than 25 feet long, "basically depicts the land (the explorers) may have crossed, including a waterfall and mountains that they would have seen on the Pacific Coast. Literally, their whole trek across the United States is culminated into this 25-foot by 8-foot space."

Knapp said another challenge was the amount of acrylic paint needed for the project — more than \$350 worth.

"The wall is very porous, so it soaked up the paint very quickly," she said. "In essence, I needed almost a double layer of base coat before I could go in to do the details."

The mural, she said, is "very close to completion" — but will require some last-minute work. But Knapp guarantees the paint will be dry

Art Day Sunday

Sunday will be "art day" in downtown Madison — and that's especially exciting for Kristy Stark Knapp. Artwork done by the professional artist from Madison will be showcased at two sites.

Knapp will be at the Madison County Museum's new building at 210 W. Third St. from 1 to 2:30 p.m. for the unveiling of the Lewis & Clark Expedition mural the county's historical society commissioned her to paint.

The mural will be formally dedicated during a 2 p.m. program.

From 2:30 to 4 p.m., Knapp will be at the nearby Historic Presbyterian Community Center for Arts & Education in conjunction with an open house for her "Nebraska's Big Sky" exhibit.

Knapp said over the past several months, she completed a series of 12 acrylic paintings specifically for the exhibit.

The paintings, she said, incorporate a variety of techniques.

"Some of the paintings are more tight; some are more loose," Knapp said. "Some are of stormy skies; some are crystal-blue skies; some of them are harvest skies."

The emphasis is on the sky. "The scenery is very simplex, not complex, so



Knapp

when it is unveiled Sunday afternoon.

Even as an artist with a tendency for perfection, Stark said she is "very satisfied" with the final product. "It's the culmination of a lot of hard work," which began in March with the research, she said.

Speaking on behalf of the Madison County Historical Society, Carol Robertson of Madison said, "We are very pleased with the results."

The society also commissioned Knapp to design and paint an expansive mural behind the Christmas village in the new museum building that was unveiled last December.

With her second museum mural near completion, Knapp can now spend more time illustrating a children's book a friend has written on bullying. Knapp works in a variety of artistic media, including photography.

"I'm an artist who has adapted to her environment," said the 1994 Laurel-Concord High School graduate. "Northeast Nebraska will not allow you to do one thing and only one thing to make a living artistically. I've developed skills in (many) different areas."

that way the skies speak more than the surface of the land," she said.

The unframed paintings will all be for sale.

While Knapp said she is personally excited about Sunday's "art day," she adds that both events will likely draw newcomers to the museum and the community center at 104 E. Fourth St., "so that's also very exciting."

Both buildings will be open from 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday. There is no admission fee.

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