

# MIZZOU

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## Alumni Profile

### The fine art of giving

Vincent Van Gogh is credited with saying, “Art demands constant observation,” and in 2000, Kansas City, Mo., artist Susan Lordi Marker invented her line of Willow Tree® figurines on just such a premise.

“I am always observing people,” says Lordi Marker, BS HE '76. “I really depend on life for my work because this line communicates body gesture in its most simple, pure form. There’s no decoration, not even a face.”

Lordi Marker designs Willow Tree figurative sculptures to depict emotion; they often focus on significant life experiences, such as the birth of a child, or family relationships. With sales of several million pieces a year, Willow Tree is one of the most successful gift lines both in the United States and internationally.

“I still approach each piece like it’s a one-of-a-kind art piece, not as if it’s going to be mass-marketed,” Lordi Marker says. “I hope that if I pull from my own experiences, it will touch a universal chord and resonate with others.”

Using family and friends as her models, Lordi Marker sculpts each original piece by hand. Her



Susan Lordi Marker invented and designs Willow Tree figurative sculptures. The “Close To Me” figurine, inset, is Lordi Marker’s newest figurine for 2009. It depicts a mother and daughter.




originals form the molds for several factories in China, where the figurines are produced and hand-painted for the popular market. DEMDACO, a Kansas City company, manufactures, distributes and markets the line.

“I’ve always liked to make things,” Lordi Marker says. “Recently, I was cleaning out my attic and found a bunch of my art history notes from MU. In the margins of all my notes, I had drawn human figures without faces in many different poses. It makes me think that maybe Willow Tree was always sort of in me and just had to wait to come out.”

After graduating from MU, Lordi Marker moved to Kansas City and worked in restaurant interior design. In 1993, she earned a master of fine arts degree (MFA) in textile design from the University of Kansas. She has taught design both at KU and the Kansas City Art Institute. Her artwork has been exhibited and recognized both nationally and abroad, and her fiber work is featured in the books *Art Textiles: USA* and *Susan Lordi Marker: Portfolio Collection* (both published by Telos Art Publishing, 2003). — Sarah Garber

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