

# For people who . . .

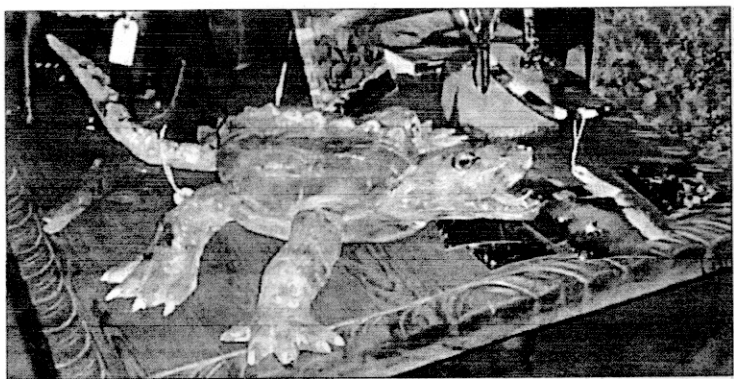


PHOTO BY JOHN EWING

Isaac Smith's wooden sculpture at San Angel Folk Art

## . . . simply must have that perfect little something

San Angel Folk Art, 110 Blue Star, 226-6688

Sloan/Hall, 5930 Broadway, 828-7738

Jai, 919 South Alamo, 225-4272

In the Blue Star Arts Complex, San Angel greets visitors with bright flowers and chirping birds. Hank Lee's shop explodes with color and imagination during the holidays and reflects the traditional folk arts of the Americas. Taking the funky "road less traveled," self-taught and outsider artists often work the wackier edge of contemporary art. Sally Ozuna's shoebox dioramas (\$100 to \$300) are tiny scenes of domestic mayhem. Exquisitely detailed down to the last stain and crumb, Ozuna depicts kitchens and bedrooms that have witnessed some criminal mischief or just plain sloth. In miniature scale, each beer can and taped-up La-Z-Boy is a virtuosic transformation of trash into treasure. From Monroe, La., Isaac Smith's wooden animal sculptures (\$300 to \$600) are gamy totems for the new millennium. Life-size, the brightly painted snapping turtle, foxes, and opossum are made from oak, pine, and black walnut native to the southeastern United States and express that region's eccentric flair. From Oaxaca, the Aguilar sisters' beautiful ceramic *Virgens* (\$200 and up) will be the centerpiece of a Day of the Guadalupe opening on Dec. 16. Rhonda Kuhlman's bottle-cap magnets, key chains, and "snuff boxes" help out leaner elves (between \$4 and \$12).

At Sloan/Hall in Alamo Heights, holiday inventory has one rule: if it doesn't make you salivate, it doesn't make it on the shelf.

Peddling Prada's sports line of shoes and beaded chokers by Jade Jagger (yes, Mick's daughter), this chic purveyor of fine gifts also carries a boggling array of bath and home indulgences. Proprietors Marcus Sloan and Shannon Hall have smartly concentrated the store's mojo around a particular item: the vessel. The most gracious and intimate of gifts, an empty container marries the giver's tastes with the recipient's everyday life. Beautiful containers suggest future possibilities, and Sloan/Hall has a diverse assortment. Handmade boxes by R & Y Augousti (\$90 to \$1000) are finished with exotic skins — including stingray, lizard, and snow fish — and inlaid with bamboo, tortoise shell, and mother-of-pearl. Felt and leather cutouts by Ply travel flat and snap-up at the corners to create sturdy bowls with *moderne* angles (\$30 to \$50). Leather boxes by the Italian Arte Cuoio come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors (\$30 to \$500). They look great stacked, but feel better in hand. On your way out, take in the shop windows where installations by local artists change regularly.

Across from the bustling Rosario's, Jai is the newest example of a quintessentially San Antonio art form. In fact, the "thrif store-cum-art installation" might have been the invention of Agosto Cuellar, a native luminary and perennial shopkeeper who opened Jai, his latest venture, with partner Liza Martinez in 1999. Combining music, art, and garage sale treasures, the King William store is the site of lively First Friday happenings. Stuffed to the gills with delectable nostalgia, it's a great place to shop the rest of the month for the difficult and unusual gifts on your list. A fine, very reasonably priced selection of vintage clothing, scarves, and accessories is featured in the front room. The backroom boasts a pot-pourri of '40s, '50s, and '60s kitsch, including swag lamps, glassware, and Mexican ceramics. Tucked away in a wooden sideboard is a lovely set of frosted tumblers painted with Arizona cacti (\$31). Part of the Jai experience is a separate gallery used for First Friday openings by local artists; of note are small, Neo-Geo abstractions by Liz Pietka. Jai also carries wildly upholstered vinyl chairs by Von Fufier (\$375). If anyone needs a hint, I want the autographed glossy of John Schneider (\$19). JE

Italian leather boxes at Sloan/Hall

