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WOMAN OF THE CLOTH

Her 'sacred art' in silk is drawn from colorful religious settings

By **Sandi Dolbee**
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People see stained-glass windows and think of all sorts of things.

Angela Joy Coppola thinks of silk. It started almost a decade ago when the former advertising executive saw the late-evening light coming through the rounded East Rose Window at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral. She told herself the design would make a lovely silk scarf.

From that accessory epiphany was born Sacred Silks, a company that sells "sacred art to live with and wear."

Customers can purchase everything from an oblong silk of a stained-glass window from Notre-Dame in Paris to a silk bed cover with matching pillows of a mosaic at St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

There are 20 designs, with more planned. Many are of stained-glass windows from houses of worship — ranging from the Tiffany Dove Window at First Presbyterian Church in Springfield, Ill., to the Rose Window at Central Synagogue in New York. There also is a meditative labyrinth design and an image of the dramatic prayer spire at the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove.

Coppola lived in San Francisco when Sacred Silks was launched. She now lives in La Costa, where she runs her company with a handful of employees out of a modest office suite in Cardiff-by-the-Sea. Her items, which include neckties, pocket squares, wall hangings and table accents, can be purchased at religious gift shops and at the Sacred Silks Web site (SacredSilks.com).

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Among the silky designs: Bell Harry Tower ceiling at Canterbury Cathedral in England (left) and the Jerusalem Cross from Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. (upper right).



Angela Joy Coppola looks through one of her "Sacred Silks" — a design of the southern rose window at Notre Dame in Paris. Howard Lipin / Union-Tribune



Woman designs 'sacred art' that can be worn

At first, Sacred Silks specialized in scarf designs. But as people began to find other uses for her products, Coppola's vision widened. Now, she shuns the s-word. "We're not a scarf company," she says.

But that doesn't mean you can't wear her silky creations as a scarf. On this particular day, Coppola herself is wearing an oblong design of the Creation Rose Window at Washington National Cathedral to accent a black pant suit.

It's like wearing silken religious jewelry or a prayer shawl, she says. "It helps me remember Spirit."

Coppola started Sacred Silks in 1998, after a career that included owning her own advertising agency. She immersed herself in the world of silk-making (the manufacturing is done overseas) and traveled around the world in search of inspiring images.

"I believe in it," says the 63-year-old president and CEO of the venture. She thinks that us-

ing these sacred images, "is a way for people to see the similarities in religions rather than the differences."

Sales total almost \$500,000 a year, according to Coppola.

Crystal Cathedral's gift shop sold four silk oblongs of the prayer spire for \$74.95 apiece between January to early March, according to a gift shop worker. "It's not bad considering the price," said the worker.

The sisterhood gift shop at Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco sells Sacred Silks' images of the synagogue's Fire and Water Windows. "They're lovely," says Lani Zinn of the pieces.

Prices of Coppola's items are somewhere between Target and Nordstrom. A satin-trimmed, 72-inch oblong silk with the Southern Rose Window at Notre Dame goes for \$75 on the company's Web site. For \$49.95 you can get the same design made into an 18-inch-square pillow. Coppola also points out that prices start at \$25 for pocket squares.

Certainly, wearing religion on your sleeve — or somewhere else — isn't new. Reli-



The "Sacred Silks" designs include scarves, table coverings and wall hanging. Above are images from Grace Cathedral in San Francisco (the east Rose window, left) and St. Paul's Cathedral in London ("Creation of the Birds," right).

gious merchandise is big business. Christian goods are a \$4 billion-plus industry, with clothing amounting to roughly 30 percent of the sales. There also are Jewish T-shirts (with slogans like "Yo Semite"), Celtic tattoos and New Age tank tops decorated with meditational symbols.

On the other hand, mixing

the sacred and the secular has led to some unfashionable conflicts. One online company recently had to pull a line of panties after Silks objected to one of their sacred symbols being put on the underwear. Buddhists also weren't pleased when another manufacturer put Buddha images on bikinis. Coppola says she's careful to

get permission to reproduce any artwork. Her company also gives 10 percent of sales to the organization where the image came from.

"This is not about offending anyone at all," she adds. "This is about taking the beauty of sacred places around the world and bringing it out into the world."

The church Coppola attends, the Seaside Church of Religious Science in Encinitas, uses the silks as wall decorations in the sanctuary. They're also sold in the church's gift shop.

"Everybody loves them," says the Rev. Tammy Miller, Seaside's assistant minister. "They're beautiful, and they're sacred."