

# Artist Creates Keepsake Rain Barrel Art

Yvonne Delgado Thomas of Geauga County, Ohio, transforms ordinary rain barrels into works of art. “Years ago, I saw an ad in the local paper for artists to paint rain barrels for a Geauga County Soil & Water fundraiser,” says Thomas. “I didn’t consider myself an artist then, but I loved the idea of upcycling food-grade ugly barrels into something beautiful for the garden.” That first project led to many more painting requests. “I’ve been one of their signature artists ever since.”

After years of practice, Delgado has the process down to a science. “I’m always searching for good deals on food-grade barrels,” she says. “I prefer a specific design but am limited by what’s available. From there, we power wash the barrel and sand it where needed. I’ll spray paint a colorful base, and then once dry, I paint using acrylics and spray paint. The final step after everything dries is an all-weather autobody clear coat.” She shares that it takes at least two weeks to paint a rain barrel, plus another week to have it clear-coated.

“I like to tailor the design to the customer,” she says. “Sometimes they send me a photo of their vacation, home, barn or cabin. Or they’ll want something specific, such as a cardinal reminding them of a loved one, a sign, outdoor animals, etc. Sometimes, my customers trust me to create something unique and special.”

Thomas sells her designs through her website, Instagram and Facebook. Most barrels cost \$450, though pricing varies based on complexity. “They’re popular for Mother’s Day and birthdays,” Thomas says. “I paint between 5 and 10 a year.”

She also takes on commission work, typically of country scenes, though she’s open to other challenges. She teaches Wine



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& Art classes, as well as small group and individual lessons for those nearby. “I believe that everyone is creative,” she says. “With gentle guidance and inspiration, they can create artwork that brings them joy.”

Thomas’ art will be on exhibit at the Fairmont Center for the Arts from June through July 2025. “I enjoy selling original art and professional prints,” she says. In the future, I want to have a pop-up shop to take to different venues. I’m also building a studio in my home to serve as a store and teaching space.”

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**“I can only imagine how many children’s lives were changed by the knowledge that they sat on top of that giant of a cow,” says Ruebush, who owned and cared for Babe.**

## Babe The Giant Steer’s Legacy Lives On

Babe, a Holstein steer from Kooskia, Idaho, has left a lasting impression on the community he once called home. This gentle giant, measuring an impressive 6 ft., 2 in. tall and 13 ft. long, soothed troubled lives with rides on his back.

Dale Ruebush took over Babe’s care when the calf was abandoned at birth by his mother due to pneumonia. The Ruebush family used a variety of natural remedies, including hydrotherapy, to save his life.

They gained a loyal pet for their efforts, and Babe earned a special place within their Christian ministry. It took just one ride with a custom-made halter for Babe to be saddle

broken, and the steer spent the following years helping troubled teens improve their social skills and self-confidence.

“But it wasn’t just teens who benefited from Babe,” Ruebush says. “Awed toddlers, adventurous grandmothers, and so many people in between have a precious memory of sitting atop the world while mounted on that cherished beast.”

Babe made an impression on everyone he met, which made his unfortunate demise all the more painful for the humans who loved him. “Babe has been gone several years now,” says Ruebush. “His memory still makes us emotional.”

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**Older Cub Cadet models, including 123s like Grufman’s, are popular for restoration.**

## ‘Tiger Cub’ Garden Tractor A Hit At Shows

Minnesota garden tractor collector Linda Grufman is the proud owner of a restored and repainted Cub Cadet 123 with a classic “tiger” paint scheme. Grufman’s tractor drew plenty of smiles at the Minnesota State Fair in 2024, but it didn’t perform like 123s did six decades earlier.

That was the summer when new Cub Cadet hydrostatic model 123s were part of a “wild animal” act put on by International Harvester. A dozen or more of the tractors were painted with black body stripes or spots and a big cat face on their front panel. The tractors had pop-up ears on the hoods and carried a 3-ft. long curved black and gold tail.

IH hired a team of special drivers to showcase the painted 123s in a show performed at numerous county fairs, the Farm Progress Show and the Minnesota State Fair. Under ringmaster Fearless Frisbee’s guidance, professional drivers were directed

with whips and a starter’s pistol. Their antics showcased agility, speed, and the tractor’s ability to quickly change directions forward and back because of an innovative hydrostatic transmission.

Audiences loved the operators pulling wheelies, jumping over small ramps, taking corners on two wheels and throwing gravel by quickly changing directions. Grufman says the marketing scheme worked well to sell the Hydro Cadets, a significant upgrade from earlier V-belt and direct drive models.

The Cub Cadet brand has continued to innovate and thrive over the years under three different companies and is now owned by Stanley Black & Decker. Many older models are popular for restoration, including 123s like Grufman’s, which now has that clever paint scheme.

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Ruebush shares Babe’s story to encourage readers to be responsible with their pets. “Because of our limited pasture, neighbors would allow Babe to graze their unused property/pastures,” he says. “One day, a pack of dogs attacked Babe. This totally surprised him, I’m sure, as all the dogs he knew were affectionate to him. In his panic, he ran over an area strewn with rocks, falling and seriously damaging his right hip. Fortunately, a neighbor stepped in to scare off the dogs, then called me and helped Babe home.”

Ruebush did all he could to help Babe heal, with encouraging results. Unfortunately, the steer slipped on ice several months later, causing him to break his still-weakened hip. With no hope of recovery, a neighbor put Babe down humanely.

Even in death, Babe remained a blessing. “My daughter contacted the local food bank to give them access to Babe soon after he was put down,” says Ruebush. “They harvested over 400 lbs. to share with those struggling to make ends meet. Then, a local taxidermist donated his time and expertise to prepare

Babe’s skull so it could be donated to the local Kamiah Valley Historical Society Museum. We truly live in an amazing area.”

Still, grief has hit Ruebush hard. “It took us a while to recover from losing Babe. And it was a while before I allowed myself to bond with another animal,” he shares. “Fortunately, my oldest daughter asked me to join her in K9 Search and Rescue activities, and she gave me a female puppy to work with for that purpose. That dog helped me to heal from the loss of Babe and has taught me to love animals on a new level. God is good.”

Moving forward, Ruebush continues to appreciate how many lives Babe touched. “We may never know the positive good Babe did for so many people. I can only imagine how many children’s lives were changed by the knowledge that they sat on top of that giant of a cow. I’m sure it has affected their confidence for the rest of their lives.”

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