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## Money & Careers

ON THE JOB

### Paperwork is Charlestown artist's specialty

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When you make 3-D paper sculptures as bridal cake toppers, expect the fire department to get involved. So for Aimee Empey, it came as no surprise when two elaborate paper wedding centerpieces had to be sprayed with fire retardant chemicals before they were approved for use in a reception hall.

Empey, 36, is the owner of Paper, Gowns & Glory in Charlestown, where she specializes in paper sculptures for weddings and other occasions. She works in all kinds of paper — recycled, imported, even paper drop-cloths from hardware stores.

She has used brown masking paper as a design element in flowers and wedding favors.

Empey prides herself on creating lifelike figures that capture details such as the

shape of wedding dresses, lace, pleating, facial silhouettes, body proportions, and hairstyles.

"I study the paper's integrity and engineer the skeleton so it's sturdy and acts as a base," said Empey.

#### How did you decide to start Paper, Gowns & Glory?

My cousin knew I was a mixed-media artist and asked if I could do something special for a cake topper. I asked, "Do you mind if it's



PHOTOS BY JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

Aimee Empey creates paper sculptures for weddings, including figures that represent the bride and groom and paper bouquets.

made in paper?" since it is a readily available material and fairly easy to work with. She sent me a picture of her dress, and I created an over-the-top, intricate miniature replica 3-D paper bride and groom, sort of a dream-like portrayal.

#### What's the most unique request you have gotten from a couple?

One bride wanted a life-size replica of her dress in paper, a strapless ball gown, to stand almost 5 feet tall.

#### Your own wedding is coming up — will you be using your paper designs?

Oh, yes. The whole kit and caboodle is done, including 700 single paper floral stems. I made chandeliers out of paper for the dance floor. But I am not making a replica of my own dress. It's the chef who won't eat his own food syndrome.

'One bride wanted a life-size replica of her dress in paper, a strapless ball gown to stand almost 5 feet tall.'

AIMEE EMPEY

#### Is it true what they say about starving artists?

Yes. I have had every odd job on the side, including waitress, bartender, baby-sitter, and making aprons. But someone once told me that female artists don't start making a living until age 30 or 40. That statement is holding true for me.