



Featured Artist

Bobbi Mastrangelo

by Sumara Love

Meet our "cover girl," internationally known, multi-talented artist and illusionist, Bobbi Mastrangelo the "grate." Most people probably don't give a second thought to manhole covers, but Bobbi's unique style of art transforms a mundane iron cover into a jewel-like mandala with her sculpture relief work, using deeply embossed prints on her handmade paper that look so real, they fool you.



INTERVIEW

Bobbi, please tell us a little bit about the type of art that you do and how you got started.

Believe it or not, my theme is manhole covers and water covers. As mundane as the subject matter appears, it offers some perks. For instance, news reporters have referred to me as "Cover Girl" or the "The Grate Artist."

The choice of this subject matter evolved during a college printmaking course at Stony Brook University. Professor Dan Welden strongly suggested choosing a single theme or a style if I wished to succeed in the art world. My Art History Professor, Lawrence Alloway, after viewing photos of my art, commented: "You seem to have a propensity for Circles."

Mastrangelo's Propensity for Circles



"Tempus Fugit"
(Spray Paint)



"Sunburst"
(Construction)



"Whirlpool Galaxy"
(Mixed Media)

What inspired you?

Two pages of manhole cover photos caught my attention. They were round, definitely circular. Though they were hosted in a book of Sol Le Witt's art, they were in no way related to his minimal art and constructions. He just found them found fascinating. I agreed, and excited by my new-found theme, looked to the artists that were introduced in Professor's Alloway's Class on American *Pop Art. (Pop Art deals with ordinary common objects.) Jasper John's Target and Flag constructions were inspirations for my relief works.

The Whitney Biennial in NYC featured constructions and installations that invited participation either mentally or physically which also motivated me.

During the early 1980's I acquired a Dickerson Combination Printing Press, which opened a whole new host of possibilities right in my own home.



"Sidewalk in Port Jefferson"
(Sculpture Relief)

Bobbi's Early "Grate Works"



"The Grate Image"
(Self portrait relief)



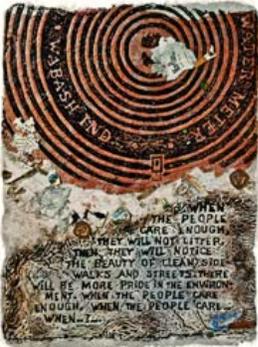
"Flockhart Cover"
(Oil Pastel on printed tea paper)

How did you develop your unique style of art?

After I had created about six art works on my new theme, I made a bold move and entered slides to a prestigious juried competition called "New Art in New York." I was delighted to learn that I had been accepted, but a bit daunted to learn that they wanted about twenty art pieces and I had six weeks in which to create the balance. I had to really think in terms of manhole art for a unified presentation. The event was held at Parson's School of Design with a successful meld of talented artists and many enthusiastic attendants. For me it was very exciting and rewarding. I shared an exhibition space with Ivy Vale whose father was the famous actor in the Dunkin Doughnut Commercial "I gotta make the doughnuts!" I made valuable contacts in the art world and was urged to join The National Association of Women Artists. From then on my professional theme was "Grate Works!"

"The Grate Works " were created in many media, but I stayed true to the theme. Sculpture was my favorite medium. I gradually developed techniques to make a streetscape appear real and very heavy. But sculptures were very time consuming and I did own a printing press, which meant I could create multiples. They were more affordable for my art patrons. And when I learned how to make my own paper, I really became euphoric. Hand made papers with variations in color and texture, became my printing medium of choice. They could be fashioned thicker than ordinary printing papers, yielding a deep embossment on my press.

I started to appreciate the resources that were contained under the covers. The employees of the Water Districts taught me about all the street markings and shared their information on water purity and conservation. The "Save Water" sculpture relief has imbedded cast paper water drops. A collage of the water cycle is set behind the rim opening.

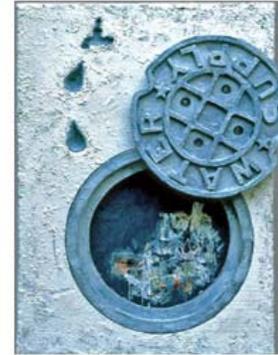


"When the People Care"
(Collagraph-collage, hand made paper)

Works of the late 1980's



"Buckeye"
(Sculpture relief)



"Save Water"
(Sculpture relief with collage insert)

I have a vast collection of rubbings and photos of grates, manhole covers and water covers. Often, I would have to brush off cigarette butts and litter to make a rubbing. "When the People Care" actually is collaged with litter from the sidewalk. The condition of our town's sidewalks and streets became a concern of mine, and so with local residents we formed a group called C.L.E.A.N. (Committee for Litter Elimination And Neatness). Members adopted spots, kept them clean and beautified them with shrubs and flowers.

The Smithtown Highway Department worked with C.L.E.A.N. for the edification of the Township. But they also expanded my manhole cover knowledge. Several employees taught me about street markings and road reflectors.

When I was creating the Con Edison Installation, they lifted a cover for me to study the "chimney" support below. My art related to public works and the employees, which in turn made me more appreciative of their value and service.

As Picasso said, "Art is life and life is art!" and my life covered many dimensions.

Have you always been creative?

Creativity reigned in our home. Dad had a flair for engineering, drafting and inventing small items. Mom was creative in the kitchen and loved the beauty of flowers. She taught us to notice beautiful sunsets and unique details in our surroundings. She gave my five younger siblings and me the freedom to explore new options and encouraged our projects.

My sister Judie and I painted the windows in a stained glass motif for the Christmas Holidays. I lugged slate pieces from the creek bed and dug them in to create a walk area in front of our porch. In grammar school and high school I poured lots of enthusiasm into all the projects involving drawing and painting.

When our three kids were growing up, we never purchased Halloween costumes, but designed and created them ourselves. We were inventive in the kitchen. Peter's Castle Cake won first prize at the church fair.

How has your art evolved over the years?

My early art from the 1960's – 1970's was in the traditional mode with traditional subjects: the figure, landscapes, still life themes, flowers and churches. The media included: woodcuts, lithographs, drawing and painting.

This period is labeled: "Classic Works."



"Amiens Cathedral, France"
High school pencil drawing



"St. James, NY Episcopal Church"
(Lithograph)



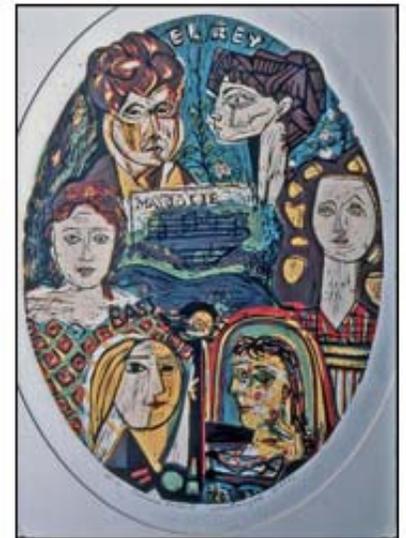
"The Sylvan Sage"
(Woodcut)

Then came "The Mod Works."

Now this period had several modern influences: Picasso and Contour Drawing

When my children were young, I home schooled them each summer vacation in creative writing and drawing. We were on the biography unit when our daughter Anne Marie pleaded, "Mom, if you are going to make us write, then you should do it too." I got started on a biography of Picasso, and just kept going until I had completed my own book entitled "Picasso's Women, Wars and Whims." During the process my eight-year old typed me a note:

*"dear mommy,
don't get discouraged you are doing wouderfu I on piscasso.
good lu ck on pissic o
Lovf , annie*



Picasso's Women ended up in an ambitious Six-color composite print entitled "Picasso's World!"

Discovering Betty's Edward's "Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain" took me on the path of contour drawings. They are a real challenge, because during the process, one gazes at the object to be drawn, but may not look at the drawing paper. (I often set up a book blockade). The results are whimsical. They reminded me of Picasso's later works. Using this method with collage, I created some fascinating "soul portraits." I did contour drawings and took reference photos of the individuals. They told me their interests and hobbies and some of their philosophies. I had a friend do a their horoscope reading and then let the muses guide me as I collaged into the contour drawing colors, textures and images that reflected their personalities. I truly enjoyed this phase of my art.

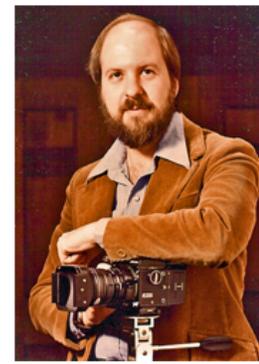
Mod Works



"Mark Twain"
Pure contour drawing



"Ron Dennenberg"
Soul Portrait



Ron Dennenberg
(Professional photographer)

The "Grate Works" continued to expand with prints on hand made paper with an emphasis on water protection.

A collagraph is printed from a relief-collaged printing plate. The lower areas were hand painted with oils. High surfaces were wiped clean. Black ink was rolled over the raised surfaces before printing on dampened paper.

The linocut was derived from a piece of linoleum block with wood filler texture added to the top. All the areas showing the blue paper were cut or gouged out. Black ink was rolled over the remaining surface before printing.



"Water Service"
(Collagraph)



"Bell Telephone System"
(Linocut on blue H.M. paper)



"Water, Water, Everywhere"
(Collagraph)

Who or what has been the most influential person or thing in your life, as it relates to you as an artist?

The most influential person regarding my art has been my husband of fifty years. Wherever we live he has made sure that I have studio space in which to create. When we moved to Florida, the available studio space was the prime consideration in choosing a new home. My studio is in a cassita just across the courtyard from the main house.

Not only do I have the space, but also I have the time to create art. Al is not very demanding of my time. We usually eat out and he often arranges his schedule around my deadlines. Al has a great eye for judging art and for hanging it too. I value his opinion. He will caution me to stop before a piece is over worked. His draftsmanship came in handy when I needed to put the street lines on the six- foot by eight- foot installation of "Tuthill Street."

What have been some of your crowning achievements or most memorable moments as an artist?

Some of the "Grate Moments" in my art career include:

1992 "City Views" Exhibit at the Staller Center for the Arts, Stony Brook, NY with stellar artists: Luis Cruz Azaceta, Camille Billops, Robert Birmelin, Rackstraw Downes, Ralph Fasanella, Red Grooms, Yvonne Jacquette, Orville Robertson & Jan Staller.

1996 Reception Weekend in May and a year-long exhibit at the Baltimore Public Works Museum in Baltimore MD

1984 Newsday, 1987 and 1998 Channel 12 TV Interviews.

2001 in Moscow: Meeting Alexander Kholopov and Natalie Lamanova, hosts of the website: "Sewers of the World, Unite."

2001 Full-page article in The Baltimore Sun, "Finding Beauty in the Grate Beyond," by Michael Ollove.

2005 Sculpture 1st Prize "Three Sewer Hitter" & 2009 "Water, the Essential Element" Osceola Center for the Arts, Kissimmee FL



"Con Ed Maintenance"
(Installation: Staller Center for the Arts)



"Bobbi at Baltimore Public Works Museum"
Two rooms of her art were on exhibit for all of 1996.)



"Three Sewer Hitter"
(1st prize Osceola Arts Center)

What are some of your future artistic plans? What is your vision for your art? Where do you see yourself down the road?

My vision for "The Grate Works" to be recognized globally and to one day have a paragraph or two about them in the art history books. I am beginning a fiber on canvas series of World Water Covers. Each country's typical water cover design would be superimposed over its flag. This installation of thirty or more world water covers would be the highlight of "Water Works" exhibition proposals to fine arts museums.

My biography is contained in the Clara Data Base of Washington DC's National Museum of Women in the Arts. I plan to have all my art events, catalogs and news articles transferred to CD's for their archives and for the museum that have or will have collections of my work.

What haven't you done that you would still like to do in the realm of art?

Japan presently has some of the most amazing manhole covers in the world. Some are even colored. Each Prefecture has its own unique cover, featuring a special symbol, flora, fauna, landmark or festival design. I would like to visit Japan to document some of these covers in photos and rubbings for future art works. I also look forward to meeting Masa Yuki, my pen pal for the past twenty-five years, who lives in the Iwate Prefecture.

What advice do you have for someone desiring to become an artist?

Dare to dream, to create, and be true to yourself.
Study, observe.
Perfect your craft.
Set goals.
Have a plan and work your plan.

Here is a verse to carry in your heart:

Dreams

By Langston Hughes

Hold fast to dreams.
For if dreams die,
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

"Grate Wishes" to Sumara Love and those who follow her dreams for a wholesome, peaceful world.

Thank you so much Bobbi! May you forever be blessed with such incredible talent!

To view more of Bobbi's amazing artwork, please visit her website:

www.bobbimastrangelo.com

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