

Artist Has Patriotic Passion

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POINCIANA | Bobbi Mastrangelo has always considered herself a patriotic individual.

"I want people to appreciate what we have as our heritage, and protect it," she said. "I don't want to see that lost."

Now 74, Mastrangelo is an artist who lives at the Solivita adult community in Poinciana, where she continues to create new works of art. Her "Buckeye Water Meter" wall relief is now on exhibit at The Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, Ohio -- a place she knows well.

"I was born in Youngstown," she said. "I'm looking at placing some of my works in bigger museums. They're now in smaller museums. I inquired about the Butler Institute of American Art because of my birthplace. I just had an interest in it."

Mastrangelo also has an interest in patriotism and the uniqueness of American culture, a sense that she called a "passion from within, and caring about your country."

"Growing up knowing we have a nation where we can speak freely and you can pretty much become what you want to become. When you study other countries, you see how much harder it is living in them."

That's one of the reasons why Mastrangelo decided to create a sculpture that looks back on the tragic terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001 -- and the brave nation that rose up to fight back, and heal itself.

"I have a sculpture called 'Don't Go Soft on Terrorism,' " she said. "It has a collage on all the 911 happenings, taken from Life magazine."

"I wrote a whole story about it. We have a coffee hour once a year here at Solivita, with authors reading their own writings, and I wrote about how I came to do 'Don't Go Soft on Terrorism.'"

Mastrangelo, who is known for her work replicating water covers and manhole covers in streetscapes, said she loves patriotic works of art.

"I do a lot of manhole cover artwork, and one man came and visited it at Solivita and saw my work and said 'You ought to do a patriotic sculpture,'" she recalled. That inspired Mastrangelo to move forward on this particular sculpture.

"I just started on it and I said 'Don't Go Soft on Terrorism,' so I could use pillow foam to make it, and I got the camouflage material," she said.

"Then I put all the images in and they're rolled out and stuck out in a 3D way. They all come from Life magazine."

Mastrangelo said she hopes to display the sculpture if other artists also decide to create works of art that reflect back on 9/11, which happened a decade ago.

"It could be part of a 9/11 tribute," she said. "I don't have to be the whole thing."

In the meantime, Mastrangelo said she's pleased to be living in a community that has so many artistic people as neighbors.

"I'm sitting on my lanai right now," she said. "We face the preserve. It's a very beautiful place, and the people are very inspiring here."

"A lot of people who were successful in what they did before are having a very happy retirement and enjoy sharing their talents. It's a very encouraging environment -- lots of energy here."

"Avatar (the developer of Solivita) is really encouraging people to live life to the fullest here. You should see how many women dance in the yoga and zumba classes. There are some men in the dancing classes, also."

Another Solivita resident, Fernando Valverde, agreed that the retirement community on the Polk County side of Poinciana is blessed to be the home to so many artistic residents.

"There's a lot of great talent here," he said. "We have all sorts of art shows here."

His daughter, Emilie Valverde, said another Solivita resident and a good friend, Merri Tattinian, travels the country doing art shows.

"She's a very good artist and she does a lot of art shows around Solivita, and right now she's in Park City, Utah," she said. "They travel all over the county doing shows, her and her husband."

As for Mastrangelo's Ohio show, the 75th Annual Juried Midyear Exhibition runs from June 28 until Aug. 28. The Butler Institute was the first museum dedicated to American art.

To learn more, log on to www.bobbimastrangelo.com (The Manhole Artist).