

~ POSTCARD PROFILE ~

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Bobbi Mastrangelo Has Grate Expectations for Her Postcards

By Lewis Baer



Bobbi Mastrangelo with #197 (Port Jefferson)

Bobbi Mastrangelo, known mainly for her environmental art work, has become a postcard aficionado. We know her through a decade of 'Grate Works' National Postcards. We've seen her yearly creations in this or other magazines featuring her trade mark theme of manhole covers.

Manhole covers? Sure. They may have ornate designs softened by decades of traffic passing over them or fascinating names of long ago foundries and municipal agencies. Bobbi's creativity seems to come from the streets; they not only inspire her art, but her postcard involvement began there too.

"I made my first postcard," she explains, "with the message: 'When the people care enough...they will not litter,' and sent it to a catalog that published it. All of a sudden I started getting mail from people telling me about National Postcard Week. They sent me their cards, and told me I was on their lists for next year."

"Well, I'd never had much to do with postcards, but the next year I made a card of me holding a manhole cover over my head. The following year's card pictured my installation of "Con Ed Maintenance." When I say *made*, that's just what I mean. These were photos that I had printed. I pasted postcard backings onto them."

When Bobbi and her her husband moved to a townhouse, it meant forfeiting a good deal of studio space. Donating some of her art work proved to be a satisfying solution. The Baltimore Public Works Museum in Baltimore hauled away a truckload of her creations. Twelve of her works on paper, depicting manhole and water covers, are on permanent display at the museum.

This year, Bobbi printed one NPCW card for exchange and one for personal correspondence. Baltimore Museum also printed a version of "#197." The Village of Port Jefferson issued a reprint to publicize the exhibit of "Grate Works" in the artist's home town. The same design has been used for tee shirts and as hand signed postcards to promote the town's art district.

Ron Griffiths, the British "King of the Mods" has written articles about Bobbi and her postcards. His comments inspired her to try for better print jobs. She switched from black and white to a colored image when she arranged to have Modern Postcard produce her "Buckeye" card. Now Color Card prints Bobbi's current editions.

"When I saw how valuable postcards could be, I wanted the very best. NPCW cards to me are a unique collection of people's interests. It's delightful to see how collectors develop their themes over the years. I have a wonderful collection from my post pen pals in the USA, Canada and Great Britain. I send get well cards and 50th Anniversary greetings when I hear of an occasion. I think of these as...' random acts of kindness.' One of my correspondents wrote last year and told of his plans to visit my exhibit in Baltimore. This year he mailed me a card from the Museum."

Does she collect any other types of postcards? "Not really, except- let me see now...there are cards of historic Port Jefferson, and of course St. James, where we used to live. I enjoy sending many postcards, not only the ones I have made, but special cards. I try to choose them to suit the people who receive them."

Okay, the big question: Why manhole covers? "That's easy. When I was studying art, my instructor commented that I seemed to favor circular themes. About that time I came across a book of photos with several shots of manhole covers as design elements. I hit on it! I've always been interested in traffic safety and litter- free streets, and my art fit right in. Municipal workers love it, because it is art that relates to their jobs."

Postcards play a major role in Bobbi's creative life. "They give a ready image of what I do. They are capsule visuals. They are keepsakes. I send "Grate Wishes" on postcards because they attract attention.. Each postcard is a piece of me. If I can't be there, the postcard and my art can."*

* Condensed and edited from the original article. Reach Lewis Baer at P.O. Box 621, Pengrove CA 94951; E-mail: ursusmjr @ metro.net

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