

Call It Litter-al

St. James artist, Bobbi Mastrangelo, shows her brand of art. Pat Colombraro Photo

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Feature

An Art form All Her Own

BY MARJORIE KAUFMAN

The children of tomorrow can't love this world if we the people of today destroy its beauty before they ever see it.

Graffiti by the Fabulous Five

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his is no ordinary artist's studio.

This one is filled with labeled garbage, categorized waste products, photos and prints and rubbings of man hole covers; all sorts of various foam materials, a paper press and even a closet filled with clothes designed for the artist with the manhole cover motif. This is more like an underground artist's revolution! This is an artistic revolution

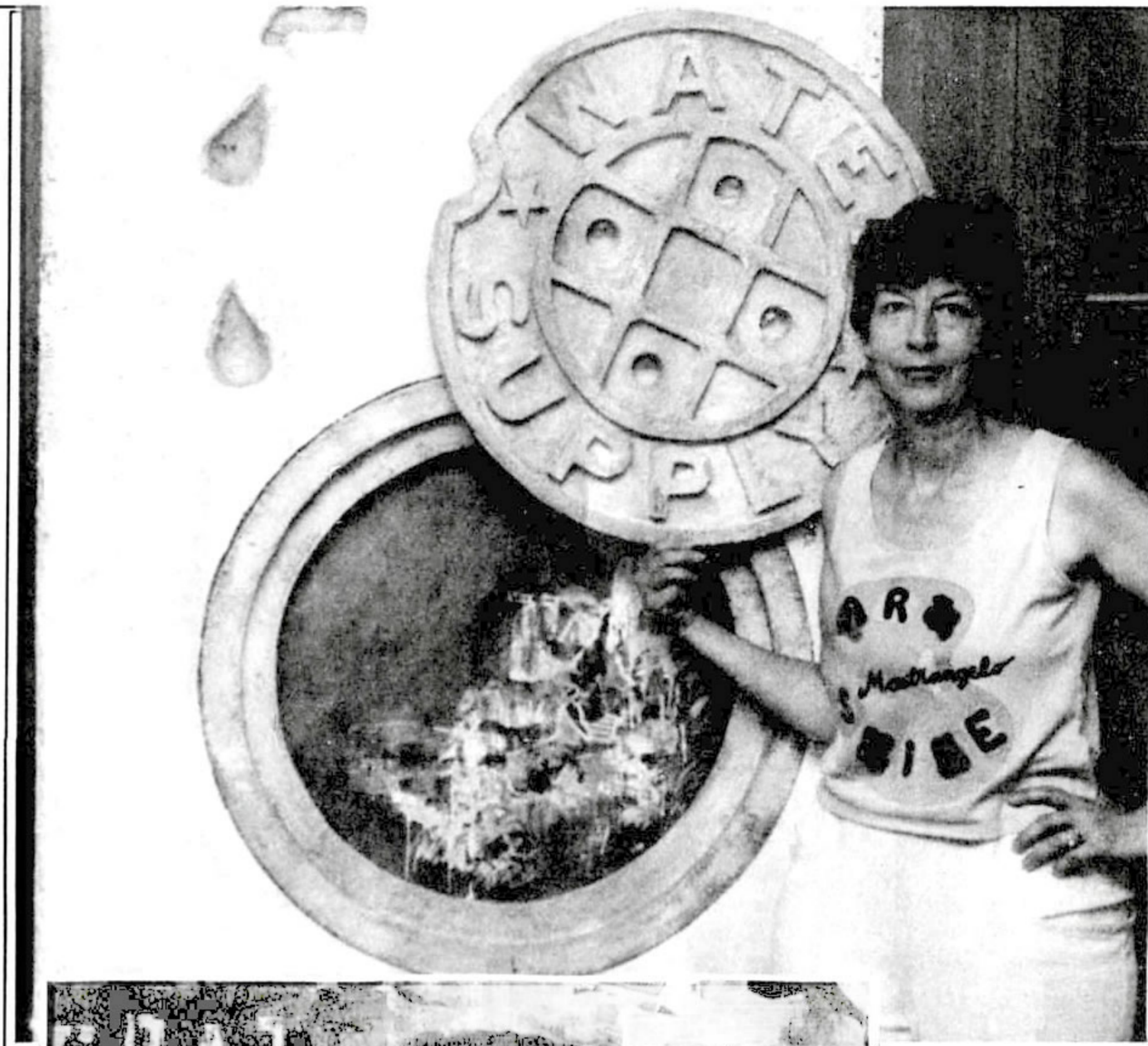
against the plague of our environment; a one-woman assault against litter and the society that has depended on it, the disposable society of the 80s.

"Don't litter" is the St. James environmentalist artist, Bobbi Mastrangelo's, message, and yes, "You can make a difference if you don't." But, if you must, don't do it around her, unless you don't mind it ending up as one of the anti-heros in one of her creations.

Mastrangelo who has been earning a name for herself as a "pop artist" over the last decade has been incorporating renderings of man hole covers and water meter caps, and more recently waste and litter, in urban settings by using a variety of media including collagraphs, prints on hand-made paper, and relief sculptures to convey her urgent message. Her art and her strong convictions to clean up the environment spill over to every facet of her busy life as artist, founder of CLEAN (Committee for Litter Elimination and Neatness), mother, wife and avid gardener. She is also working on a book, "Man Hole Covers of Manhattan" with research writer Joan Adler, which will historically and artistically document our country's development through these early designs by the craftsman that developed them.

Her latest work, "Hazardous Waste Site II" will be created on the premises at the Outdoor Art Show at the Islip Art Museums Festival Fortnight July 23-August 5. The project will represent chemical waste spilling out of an open section of a 55 gallon drum threatening to pollute a nearby water supply.

When Mastrangelo stopped teaching elementary school back in 1966, she focused her attentions to raising a family and pursuing her life long interests in art. During these early years she worked in both oils and acrylic and describes her work as conventional with an emphasis on landscapes. As a child she loved to draw and recalls her youth in



Pat Colombraro Photo



Bobbi Mastrangelo and her work, above. Below, "Grate Works 02," a collage on masonite.

Pat Colombraro photos

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Art form...

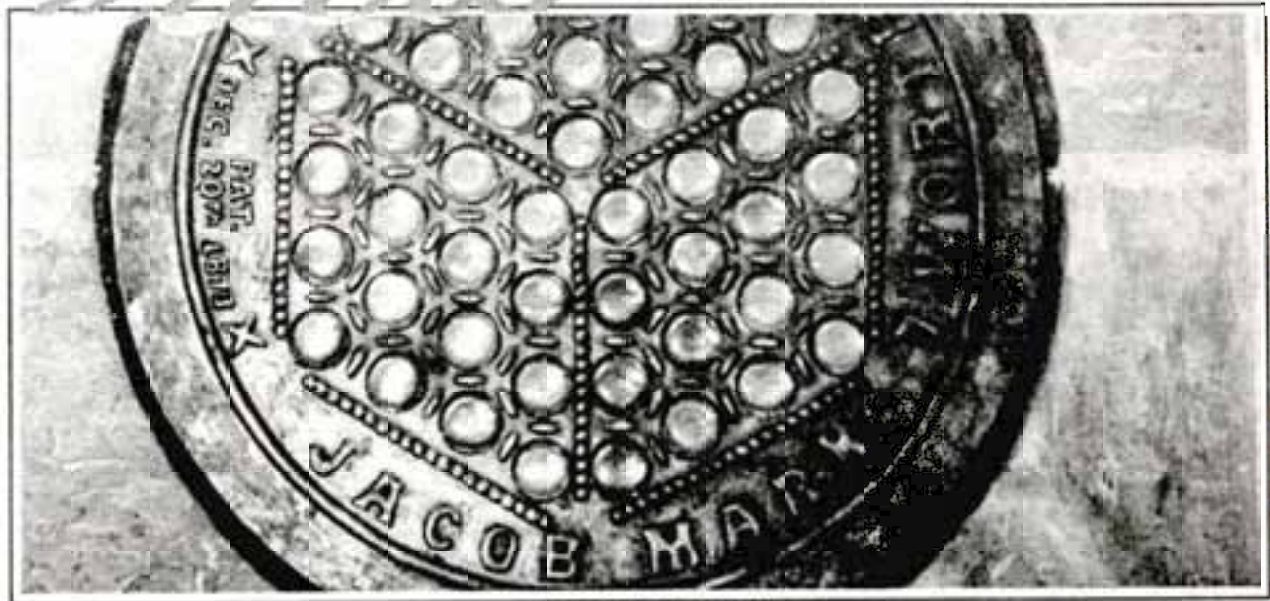
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Youngstown, Ohio, and being raised on a farm. "Probably one of the biggest influences on my work today is the memory of those days on the farm, the smell of spring, the preserved open spaces, and the joy of picking potatoes to earn Christmas presents for my family and friends," remembers Mastrangelo.

It was 1975 that Mastrangelo began her interest and study in printmaking, lithograph, linocuts and woodcuts. Holding on to her love for flowers and gardening, this led to delicate flower prints, but more importantly, it ultimately brought her to the formation of "Grate Works," a series of prints and sculpture reliefs focused on man hole covers.

While studying art in 1979 with Lawrence Alloway in Manhattan, she discovered how ordinary, mundane objects may become art forms. Her mind clicked, recalls Mastrangelo. She discovered that her print designs, especially her collage of the Aztec sign resembled what the minimalists artists were doing. "I saw photos in a book of designs taken from actual man hole covers from all over the world. When I first began manhole cover reference rubbings I researched them extensively and found that they are actually an art form that dates back to the Victorian Ages, with some very ornate and beautiful designs. They reflected a lot about how art came together with the environment of that time," explained Mastrangelo.

Her "Grate Works" actually recreate these designs through authentic renditions using in many cases a foam board in a relief sculpture form. When she literally swept away litter to reveal one early man



Jacob Mark 1873, a sculpture.

hole cover in Manhattan in the process of documenting the urban environment, she also discovered the increase of litter that had accumulated over it. This sparked a whole new component in the direction of her work. She began working with litter awareness groups and soon developed her own, CLEAN. Many of these works now directly visually affirm the need to protect our environment.

"I am really a neatnik and I never thought that I would be spending my time collecting garbage, looking for rust, and I can't believe I'm asking for the latest colors in hazardous waste!" commented Mastrangelo.

Her latest work which demonstrates and recreates both medical waste, blood, and a dead mouse near a water supply are meant for their shock value. "I want to shock people by this visual display and force them to take stock in themselves, to notice the clock ticking, and for each person to do something to stop destroying

their environment," said Mastrangelo.

An artist with a message, and a vision, Mastrangelo has the ability to look at an abandoned site, to see beyond it to the beauty that was once there and recreate the abuse that caused it. What she presents through much of her art is the threat, and an alert for people to wake up and take an active role in preventing such disasters to occur.

"Yes, I am making a statement, it is up to each of us to take an active part if we want this to be a better place. For the future I foresee possibly creating a giant walk through art experience where people can not only bear witness to the destruction of their environment, but a place where at the end of the experience they can plant seeds in a real garden which will help beautify such areas, and make a pledge with a hand print," said Mastrangelo.