



Artist Bobbi Mastrangelo with her sculpture relief, "Water Cover" at the Burchfield Art Center

AROUND TOWN BY STEPHEN KOENIG

Maryvale Alumna featured in art display at Buffalo State

The Burchfield-Penney Art Center at Buffalo State College is hosting a special exhibit titled "New York Collects at Buffalo State." It features the art of Buffalo State Alumni whose works are in museums, corporate and private collections in the state of New York and across the world, including former Cheektowaga resident Barbara Mastrangelo.

Fewer than 100 artists out of 10,000 alumni were selected to be in the exhibit. Mastrangelo took an interesting path in becoming an artist. . . She grew up in Cheektowaga as Barbara Betschen. "I lived at 919 Dick Road. My father made a living as an Electrolux vacuum cleaner salesman," she said.

Barbara was the oldest of six children, growing up in an area that was still developing. The Maryvale school system was in its infancy when Barbara was a student.

"I was in the first graduating class of Maryvale High School in 1955. The school was newly built and we were able to establish many traditions of the school," she said. "The school gave me freedom; there was a great spirit there."

Barbara remembers many of the teachers and staff at the original Maryvale School. It was Mr. North who dubbed her "Bobbi," a nickname that she uses to this day, and she remembers Samuel Bennett, the principal, like it was yesterday.

"He was a marvelous principal. His doors were always open so we could express our wishes. I fondly remember him," she said.

It was at Maryvale that she met one of the biggest influences of her life, unbeknownst to her at the time. "Bill Little was my art teacher. He was an artist and poet who lived in Clarence. He was someone I remember well."

"Bobbi" was well involved at Maryvale. She was a cheerleader and sang in the chorus, but art was not the reason she attended Buffalo State.

At her graduation in 1955 she was one of Six Honor Speakers and many expected great things out

Though she was gifted, she found out that money for education was scarce in a large family and therefore looked to scholarships to finance her college education.

Eventually she won the Jenkins Memorial PTA Scholarship, which allowed her to attend Buffalo State Teacher's College for an Elementary Education Degree.

It was at Buffalo State that Barbara met Alfred Mastrangelo, and they married in her senior year. They both left the area and had careers as teachers in Smithtown on Long Island. She later gave up her teaching career to raise three children, but her interest in the world around her would inspire her to seek more education, this time in the field of art.

For a while she explored many interests, but an instructor urged her to concentrate on a specific theme. "He noticed that I like to make circles," Mastrangelo said. This interest in circles led her to adopt her theme of grateworks in 1979. She chose a manhole covers' theme in 1984 and has stuck with it ever since.

"It wasn't anyone else's theme. I had so much fun with it I didn't want to give it up," she said. This led her to her calling in life and better things to come.

"Bobbi" has a unique way of capturing the circular pattern of manhole covers in her work. "My prints are deeply embossed on my own handmade paper and contrast the delicate balance of nature against our man-made devices," she said. One of Mastrangelo's talents include making her own paper. She acquired her own printing press some years back.

Being so close to the "Artist's Mecca," New York City had a profound influence on her artwork and interest in the subject of manhole covers. "The public works department showed me how they worked and how they were installed," she said. Eventually man-

hole covers became a general theme in her life.

Many of the manhole covers were donated to her when they were retired from the public works departments in various places. "My favorite manhole covers are a type found in South Carolina," she said.

Bobbi's wardrobe also reflects her deep interest in the art as well. "I wear outfits with manhole cover fashions. Some I made myself, some I bartered for."

"Bobbi's" work may seem a bit eccentric to some but it has shown up at some very famous private addresses, corporate headquarters and several museums in North America. Among them are the Baltimore Public Works Museum, Islip Art Museum and the New York City Fire Museum. She is also listed in "Who's Who in American Art" by R. R. Bowkers, the leading listings of famous artists in the country.

In order to be selected for the Burchfield-Penney Art Exhibit Mastrangelo had to have her artwork viewed by gallery officials. "They came all the way to Long Island to see it, and people who purchased my work brought it down so they could view it as well," she said.

Also part of Bobbi's impressive resume is that of Hall of Famer at Maryvale High School. It's an honor that recognizes alumni with outstanding achievements.

The exhibit at the Burchfield-Penney Art Center runs from July 9 to October 3, 2004. For more information: contact the art center at (716) 878-6011.

Artists update: Visit the web site:
www.bobbimastangelo.com