

Orlando Museum of Art hosts artist specializing in manhole covers

[Michael W. Freeman College Park Forum Editor](#)

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COLLEGE PARK—

When she learned that the theme was “Inside Out,” Bobbi Mastrangelo immediately thought of one thing: a manhole cover.

“I was really interested in ‘Inside Out,’ the theme of it,” she said. “I had just done a big piece called ‘Florida Storm Sewer,’ and it has the words ‘Do not Pollute’ on the top.”

“Florida Storm Sewer” is a piece of sculptured art that Mastrangelo created, featuring a simulated 24-inch diameter manhole cover that protrudes six inches from the wall.

The lower street level hugs the wall and has the green message “Do Not Pollute” stenciled on the simulated black asphalt.

“If you hang it low enough on the wall, people can peek inside and see the drain below,” she said.

It’s a theme she wanted to explore – that sewer are no longer considered the ideal place to dump anything a person wants to get rid of.

“The message I wanted to send is that people should not pour gas and oil and all sorts of junk down the drain,” she said. “The mindset used to be that whatever you didn’t want in your house, you just throw down the drain.”

“Florida Storm Sewer” and two other pieces of art by Mastrangelo, 76, will be on display Thursday at the [Orlando Museum of Art](#), part of the museum’s ongoing 1st Thursday Art Reception series, held Thursday, May 1, from 6-9. All of the works on display will focus on how the artists interpreted the theme of “Inside Out” at the museum’s suggestion.

Known as “Orlando’s original art party,” the 1st Thursdays are presented by the Associates, the OMA’s volunteer support group committed to expanding the museum’s membership and encouraging an appreciation of the visual arts.

“This will be my third time exhibiting at 1st Thursday,” said Mastrangelo, who lives at the Solivita development in Poinciana. “‘Inside Out’ is however a person wants to interpret it. I immediately thought about the Florida sewer drains, and the theme of do not pollute.”

The 1st Thursday exhibits are held one day each month, and are juried exhibits. Mastrangelo was invited to show her three pieces at tonight’s event.

“It’s an honor to be in the show,” she said. “Each month has a new theme, and artists apply according to the theme. It’s up to the artist to put in what they wanted. There’s a volunteer committee for 1st Thursdays, and they jury what is going to be in the show. I was euphoric that they picked all three pieces to go into the show.”

Admission to the 1st Thursday event for non-members of the Orlando Museum of Art is \$10 at the door. The museum is at 2416 N. Mills Ave.

It’s no coincidence that Mastrangelo’s three paintings are all about manhole covers. That’s been the theme of her work for years – and she came to it in a rather peculiar way.

“I was an elementary school teacher years ago, and a stay-at-home mom,” she said. “When I was a stay-at-home mom, I pursued my interest in art and went back to college, a little bit at a time. I studied a class in print making, and my professor, a man named Dan Weldon, told me ‘You experiment so much, people don’t know who you are.’ He said, ‘You need a theme or a style.’ “

Mastrangelo thought about it, but wasn’t sure what direction to go in. Then another professor pointed out that she had a penchant for creating circles in her work, and while looking through a book on minimalist art, she found it: two pages of art on manhole covers. Suddenly, it clicked.

“I call that my ‘eureka’ moment,” she said. “So I said, ‘I think I’ll create art around manholes.’ Before that, I think it was the last thing in my mind. I liked Renoir. I liked classical art, even though I was experimenting in shapes and textures and things. But I said ‘If I really need a theme, I’d better do this,’ and it has been a real adventure ever since.”

Mastrangelo is now an artist specializing in relief sculpture, mixed media and fiber art including handmade cast paper. Her work is best known for its focus on the theme of manhole and water covers, and has been exhibited throughout the United States and is in the collections of several museums.

Mastrangelo said she doesn’t worry about running out of ideas for new pieces.

“I have enough in my head of what I want to do in the future, and there’s enough manholes out there in the world, that I probably need two lives to do it,” she said.

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