

# Cover Girl

Sometimes, Bobbi Mastrangelo's mind is in the sewer — but sometimes her mind also is in the telephone line or even the gas line.

Well, not quite in them, but a few precious feet above them, at street level: Her mind, in fact, seems to come full circle when she lets it focus on manhole covers — the heavy metal entryways used by town, utility and municipal workers to gain access to everything from underground storm drains to gas lines. Since the mid-1980s, the Port Jefferson artist has been rendering the covers' designs — sometimes plainly functional, sometimes overtly fun — into prints, reliefs, sculptures and other works of art.

Displaying them on the Internet and in galleries such as the one at the Port Jefferson cafe Toast, where one collection is showing through the end of the month, has allowed her to give a whole new meaning to the concept of public works.

"An obsession?" she said. "I guess you could call it that."

Mastrangelo, 65, a former elementary schoolteacher, grew up on an upstate New York farm where underground water was more likely to be found in wells, not sewers. As a young mom, she gained an appreciation for public works while volunteering on a local litter cleanup committee.

Years later, renewing her childhood love of art, she opted to follow a mentor's suggestion to develop a theme for her burgeoning collection. She didn't have to dig far: Manhole covers were a natural.

You might even say they became an entryway for her, too — not into sewers but a whole new career — and a way of seeing the world. She took an informal manhole cover tour of St. Petersburg, Russia, last year while visiting the city with her husband, Alfred. People have sent her rubbings of manhole cover patterns from Japan, Ireland and elsewhere around the world. And she's also found some manhole beauty close to home. "I like the ones in New York City that have skylights," she said, referring to covers with a grate that gives a view of the street above.

ART



Newsday Photos / Jim Pepler

Bobbi Mastrangelo with one of her pieces of manhole cover art



"Vestige S.C." is among Mastrangelo's works on display at Toast, a coffeehouse and gallery in the artist's hometown of Port Jefferson.

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"Con Ed," representing a manhole cover fragment, is also on display at the cafe on East Main Street. The show runs through the end of the month.

