

# THE ARTFUL MIND

BERKSHIRES' & BEYOND MONTHLY ARTZINE JAN/FEB 2003



Susan Mastrangelo, *Head Shots*

The delightfully surprising grid installation of 100, 1 x 1 1/2-inch, sculpy clay heads by sculptor Susan Mastrangelo is an arrival. In this congregation of men, women young and old, each is unique and often unnervingly moving. They really animate the wall as you scan the group, but each may surprise you by the emotions it conveys by just a few quick jabs of the thumb. Each head has a facial expression and hairdo all its own: dreadlocks, glasses, braids and bows. Mastrangelo says she worked on them very quickly at first to get the facial character and then dried, sanded, and painted each one later.

Mastrangelo disclosed that this piece was undertaken while she was going through a period of deep loss and emotional stress. One gets the feeling that while the heads are charming and funny at first, the obsession that they convey has the power of a ritual exorcism. Having known Susan and her work for many years, I can say that she is a student of human nature, with large sensitive antennae. Part of her own journey to self-realization was a couple of years attending those acting classes in New York, and I can't help but think that there is a more than indirect relationship between this work and that experience. In her statement, Susan says that part of her goal was to portray the resilience of the human spirit as well as to include the viewer in a community of shared individual experiences. The reactions to this piece prove that she has achieved that.

These macabre and humorous creations are a long way from the faceless cookie cutter figures that marched single file around in her early paintings. Mastrangelo's sculpture, as well painting, has had a figurative basis for many years. The early sculptures of wood and plaster had a muted muffled emotional quality, the gestures were stiff and restrained, especially in the long, narrow, totem pieces from the early 90s. This constraint was embraced as an acknowledged part of the work in child-sized figures that were mummified, literally wrapped and bound. The contrast makes the openness and expressiveness in the new work a revelation.

This piece retains very little of the darkness of her older work, initially, and there is evident joy in the directness of creating and communicating. But see Mastrangelo's online exhibition, done in collaboration with the poet Geoffrey O'Brien. His succinct poems written as captions for a group of the heads lends them voices that are self-mocking, poignant, and wise, punctuating the mordant humor latent in her work with pangs of recognition and sadness. Beards, hats and bows off to Susan.

For information about the artists please contact Jefferson Snider at A.D.D. Gallery, 22 Park Place Hudson, NY, open Friday - Sunday 12-5 pm 518-822-9763. Susan Mastrangelo's online exhibition is at "Heads In Limbo" at [www.artretran.com](http://www.artretran.com)

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Surprise Results

DEPARTURES, ARRIVALS  
& PIT-STOPS-

THREE ARTISTS AT A.D.D. GALLERY



