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SCULPTOR Harriet Diamond joins her "family" in her exhibit titled "Big Wheels" at Leverett Crafts and Arts

### Art review

# Sculpture builds on the familiar

By PATRICIA WRIGHT  
Special to the Gazette

LEVERETT — Sculptor Harriet Diamond has a way with a dog. The first work I saw by this Northampton artist, at a Valley Women Artists show a couple of years back, was a trio of wonderfully observed chickenwire hounds: one sitting, one stretching, and one scratching itself with a hitched-up hind leg. I loved those hounds, body and soul. So I was glad to see a couple of loped mutts in papier mache in Diamond's current show at Leverett Crafts and Arts.

The sculptor has a way with a pre-schooler, too. Acute observation and expressive execution are again what Harriet Diamond has going for her. She has observed so sharply, and executed with such unpretentious wit, the slip-thin limbs and pollywog bellies of kids.

The forms and surfaces, torques, balances, and trajectories of kids in motion — or in more descriptive terms, the gleeful hurtling of kids maneuvering at breakneck speed near other persons and breakable objects — are central, or perhaps I should say centripetal, to the cluster of sculptures Diamond has installed

at LCA under the title of "Big Wheels."

The title, like the sculpture itself, is affectionately punning and sly. "Big Wheels" is a reference to the plastic tricycles prominent among the consumer castoffs Diamond incorporates into her sculpture. It's also a reference, she says, to "the nuclear family, and the family members in their orbits around the nucleus."

Diamond has had the imagination, and to my mind the political correctness, to assemble an unconventional family unit in this summery three-dimensional scene in thinly painted papier mache. This suggests, generously, that family is process and connection rather than a particular cast of characters.

In "Big Wheels" a lanky middle-aged man lolls back in a fictive wicker chair. A portly, grandmotherly soul hunkers down on a real wooden stool, an affable dog similarly hunkered on her lap.

There's an adorably out-of-whack sculptural still life representing,

again in painted paper and at about three-quarter size, one of those homey round oak tables and the clutter that accumulates on them in the home. There's a companionably scratching dog. And there are three scrawny little frogs of boys in bathing trunks, rocketing around the scene like atoms on their big wheel bikes.

The material is chickenwire, paper, and paint, collaged with real stuff; there are wonderful witty passages — little comments on art and reality — where the two meet.

(The red-checked tablecloth, for instance, is made partly of painted newspaper, partly of "real" plastic.)

Diamond is making a number of statements with this work.

She's saying that makeshift is more: "I like to make art from things you might throw away; that way, what the artist makes is stipped of the inherent content of

precious materials."

She's saying our domestic life is important: "The challenge for me is to take the subject of the family away from the cliché, the artificial, and the sentimental, while retaining the real and the familiar."

She's saying that observation is a pleasure, that laughter is a good, that making and expanding and making again are not only the work of women but the stuff of our common life.

She's saying that art can legitimately spring straight from the centers of our hearts. She's saying that the people and objects nearest and dearest to us may be, after all, the keys to the kingdom of art.

"Big Wheels" by Harriet Diamond will be at Leverett Crafts and Arts at Leverett Center through Sunday, May 29. Hours are Tuesday through Sunday, noon-5 p.m.

OUTLINE

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**Au Revoir Les Enfants**  
(Goodbye, Children)