

SCULPTURE

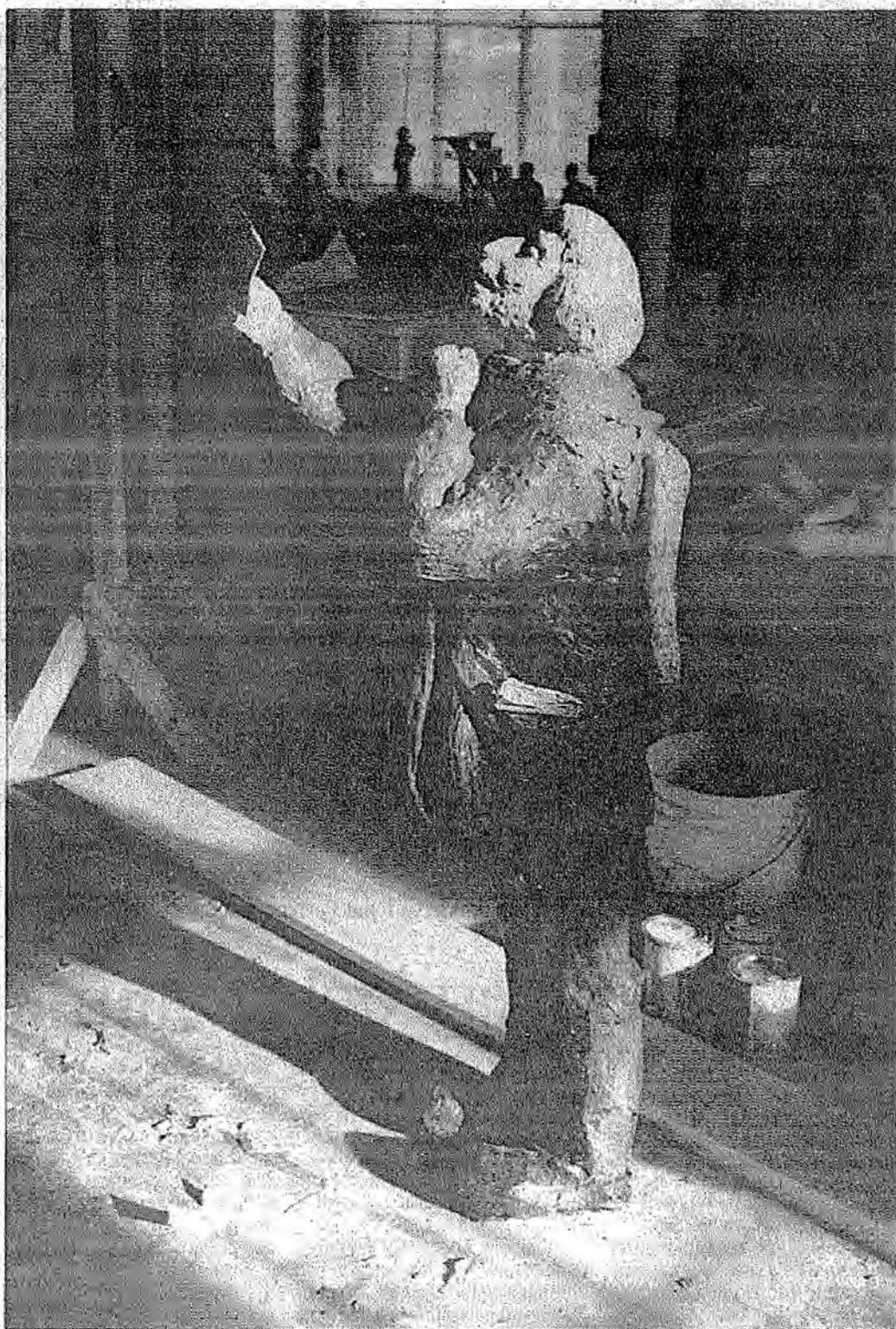
The art of activism

THE primitive details of artist Harriet Diamond's sculptures at the Oxbow Gallery in Northampton hit you first. But it's not long until their haunting, powerful truths arise.

"It's Not Over Yet," a collection of ceramic, wood and papier mâché sculpture, begins before you enter the Pleasant Street gallery. Diamond's "What Democracy Looks Like" dominates one window, depicting a raucous scene that's at once angry, unfamed and triumphant. The scene, sculpted from painted ceramic and wood, shows dozens of people struggling to reach the top of a stone monument, where a shirtless man is already standing, holding a sign high overhead that says "Stop" in red letters. Men are holding signs of protest and an American flag, and shouting into megaphones, crawling, almost animal-like, to the top.

The Northampton artist's political sculptures are fraught with criticism of the Bush administration and the Iraq War.

"Big Send Off" greets the viewer inside the gallery, with its several panels of relief sculpture installed on the white wall. In the piece's background, a large helicopter sits waiting to deliver a sea of dun-colored, helmeted soldiers to war. In the foreground, a blue-suited figure resembling George W. Bush shakes hands with a soldier, flanked by the blurred forms of other politicians, including look-alikes of Vice President Richard Cheney and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Off to one side, another man shakes the hand of a skeleton, who wears a black suit and a red tie, the very picture of death itself.



COURTESY HARRIET DIAMOND

The 4½-foot-tall figure of longtime antiwar activist Frances Crowe of Northampton is among the sculptures in city artist Harriet Diamond's politically inspired exhibit at the Oxbow Gallery.

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The ironic pomp and circumstance in the "Big Send Off" is darkly juxtaposed on the opposite wall by "Return," which depicts scores of black, American-flag covered caskets rolling off a large military plane on an army base. On the ground, a soldier loads one of his fallen comrades into the back of a truck. Nearby, an already-loaded truck makes its way out of the dark, shadowy walls of the army base to deliver the dead soldier to waiting family members. Another painted ceramic-and-wood piece, "The Terrible Truth" shows a grief-stricken couple reduced to their knees in front of their modest home, their faces contorted in pain. A military man with a notice in his hand stands next to them.

Steeped in bitterness, these pieces convey a sense of helplessness, their hugeness felt not only in their physical size — many of the installations are a few feet tall and wide — but in the emotionally complex nature of the events they depict.

For Diamond, hope comes in the form of activism.

Anchoring the exhibit is a 4½-foot tall figure of Frances Crowe



COURTESY HARRIET DIAMOND

"The Big Send Off" is composed of several panels of relief sculpture that depicts the carefully orchestrated pomp and circumstance that attends sending soldiers off to war.

the nationally known Northampton anti-war activist. Sculpted from chicken wire and painted papier mâché, Crowe, with her kindly face and sweep of white hair, holds a piece of paper from which she is reading, one hand clutched firmly to her heart. Crowe, who is 88, has been an

activist for more than 60 years, and is a member of the American Friends Service Committee and the Northampton Committee to Stop the War in Iraq.

Another of the exhibit's most striking pieces is "Before the War — March on NYC," which shows throngs of protesters

spanning the length of a Manhattan street. A variety of people, from nuns to soldiers to monks to dancers, hold signs with phrases like "Resist," "Where's Osama," and "Not in My Name," as police officers beat protestors and load them into an NYPD paddy wagon. Diamond depicts another protest in her "Northampton Vigil," which happened on Main Street.

Inspired by the work of Central and South American political artists, Diamond uses her roughly hewn sculptures to suggest that the antidote to the Bush administration's military policies and actions lies in people taking a stand. As the title of her exhibit suggests, the time hasn't yet come to give up.

— KRISTINA TEDESCHI

"It's Not Over Yet" runs through Sunday at the Oxbow Gallery, 275 Pleasant St., Northampton. Gallery hours are Thursdays through Sundays from noon to 5 p.m.; Fridays from noon to 8 p.m. For information, call 586-6300 or visit www.oxbowgallery.com.