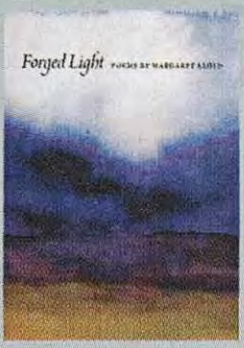


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# art people

## Harriet Diamond | sculptor

A child revs up his tricycle. A pregnant woman lies at rest, savoring a moment of profound content. Two boys at bath time scramble to get in the tub. An old woman holds pieces of jewelry that connect to her past.

Harriet Diamond's life-size papier mâché figures are made out of chicken wire and paper — but to walk into her studio in Holyoke is to be struck by how engaged, awake and alive they seem.

Seated among her creations one recent afternoon, Diamond said that in a few days she'd haul them off to Northampton, to the Oxbow Gallery on Pleasant Street, where they'd be part of an exhibit of her work, titled "Letting the Days Go By."

The 20 sculptures, made between 1985 and 1992, recall times gone by — those two tykes in the tub are now her 30-something sons, Theo and Noah. They depict that time of life that she describes as being immersed — physically, emotionally, every which way — in family.

"I started out thinking I was just trying to capture that," said Diamond, 62, who lives in Northampton. "A lot of it was joy and that feeling of being in the center of things, that I don't think you ever have in the same way again." It's a feeling, she writes in a description of the show, that's fragile, perhaps illusory. "As parents our happiness is infinitely vulnerable. There is no perfect and protected family world and the dissonance between the joy of the family world and the threat from the outer world grew into the subtext of these

ostensibly joyful pieces."

Family life eventually made way for broader themes which she explored in smaller pieces made of terra cotta and wood. "I wanted to tell a story that incorporated more of what I was thinking about," she said, such as the madness of war and the dedication of war resisters. Though her focus expanded to politics, Diamond says a common thread runs through all her work: "It's all about people."

She stored many of her papier mâché figures in the attic of her studio building, where they remained until she ventured up there a while back to see how they were faring.

"It was kind of freaky," she said. Time and mice had eaten the figures in places down to the chicken wire, gnawing the layered strips of paper Diamond had wrapped around the wire skeletons. Realizing that she should either repair the pieces or throw them out, she opted for the former. As a body of work, she said, "I felt that it was worth looking at one more time." She spent the past six months restoring the pieces for what will be the first



loves its accessibility — "the idea that with chicken wire and paper, anybody can make a sculpture" — and its flexibility. "The thing that's wonderful is that it's a lot like clay, you can make changes easily. If you don't like something, you can cut through the paper and rework the wire."

The reconstruction affirmed Diamond's long-ago choice to turn away from being an abstract painter, as she'd first set out to be, and focus on figurative sculpture. She'd made that decision one day, she said, as she pushed a stroller to the Tasty Top and realized that "my art is just so far away from this, from where I really am." Soon after, she sat down, took some clay and made a small figure. "It was the funkiest little dog," she said. "And I knew, yes, this is the right direction, this is going to be the road into art for me."

— Suzanne Wilson

"Letting the Days Go By" is at the Oxbow Gallery, 275 Pleasant St., Northampton. Noon to 5 p.m., Thursdays through Sundays, through Dec. 1. Opening reception Nov. 8, 5 to 8 p.m.

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