

Eleven for our
Eleventh

HARRIET DIAMOND

AN EXODUS FROZEN IN TIME

When you walk through the doors of Northampton's Oxbow Gallery on March 2, be prepared to confront something completely different. It is the official opening of Harriet Diamond's "Driven from their Homes," an installation of over 100 ceramic figurines retreating from the horrors of wartime destruction, seeking escape and a flight from oppression in an attempt to survive and emerge into safety. It is an exodus frozen in time.

I first became aware of the work of Harriet Diamond at one of Terry Rooney's Amherst Biennials. Diamond had created a piece called "The Pit," a startling work that became affixed in my mind. In my brief capsule of the "The Pit" in the exhibit catalog, I had this to say:

"The centerpiece is a remarkable floor-to-ceiling phantasmagoria depicting the nightmare of the war machine. Entitled 'The Pit,' the highly theatrical parade of tanks, soldiers and artillery descend down a convoluted gyre of horror. It is a marvelous construction of molded clays and textured architectural walls that fall into a Dantean inferno of doom. Powerful and intriguing, this is a chasm of poignant commentary."

What is so disarming about the work of Harriet Diamond is the childlike innocence of

the artistic aesthetic contrasted with the horror of man's inhumanity to man so chillingly depicted in her highly unusual installations.

This is the first time that Diamond will have an entire gallery space to tell her tale. The Oxbow is a Northampton fringe gallery carved out of an ancient storefront. It is an artist's collective of 36 members that is democratically run and administered, and unlike many other gallery co-ops of similar nature, it has survived.

The enormous three-story brick edifice that contains the Oxbow, along with a series of apartments and four

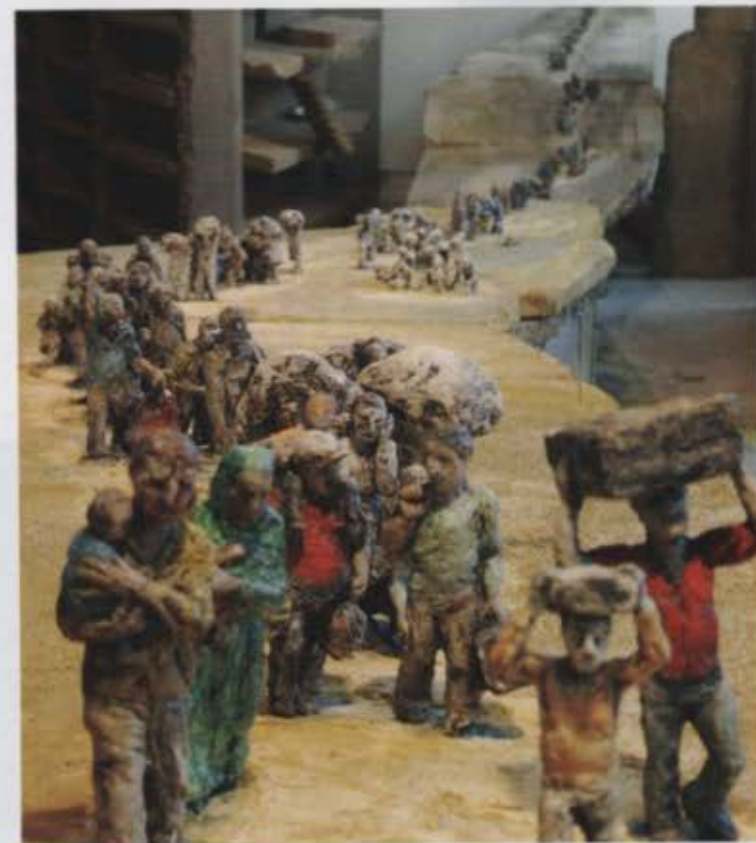
other businesses, has been sold to Lincoln Realty, which recently signed the existing commercial tenants to a one-year lease.

The timing of "Driven from their Homes" comes with a note of strong immediacy. The plight of refugees has captured the nation's consciousness as President Donald Trump battles with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), state attorneys general, the full legal system and members of Congress. They deride Trump's proposed ban on refugees from seven Middle Eastern countries as unconstitutional, unconscionable, un-American, immoral, racist, unjust

OXBOW GALLERY
275 PLEASANT
STREET

**NORTHAMPTON,
MASSACHUSETTS**
MARCH 2
THROUGH 26

Embarking.



The Long Line.

and unholy. The debate is vociferous and fuels the deep political rift in the nation and the grand divide between our two political parties.

Diamond is firmly committed to her active participation in social issues as well as in her artistic expression. She has been very busy working on this installation for over two years. Who would have imagined that the installation would open as the debate on the issue of refugees and immigration rages on the front page of every newspaper?

Of her work, Diamond stated, "I'm trying to place the viewer right in a series of scenes, so they can voyage along with these refugees and for a few moments be one of them. Like 'Oh, I am carrying a huge bundle on my head,' and 'Oh no! I am hurrying by dead bodies in the street and I don't want to look.'" She describes her 8- to 9-inch fired and painted ceramic figurines as, "wheeling suitcases, carrying children, talking on their cellphones. Some are near tears, some are chatting, and some are just trudging. The figures are sculpted as individuals, each with his or her own thoughts and gestures ... some are looking for their loved ones, some are running to escape, some are grieving."

Diamond's working technique is an eclectic expression of mixed media: sculpted clay, wood and latexed Styrofoam, supplemented with drawings and renderings. Additionally, many unexpected materials end up in the work that Diamond discovers while working organically. Nothing is sacred; if it serves its purpose, she will use it.

| Greg Morell