

Breaking up is hard to do

Putting back is better for mosaic artist Mo Ringey.

By Sue Harrison

BANNER STAFF

Artist Mo Ringey describes her life as "sort of accidental" and attributes to a chance occurrence her entire art form of encasing discarded items with intricate mosaics made of broken safety glass. She is having a show at Pegasus Gallery, 432 Commercial St., Provincetown, with a reception from 7 to 9 p.m. on Friday and continuing through Sept. 21. (David Wander will also show recent work.)

"I always painted and liked to make pieces out of things I took from the garbage or found on the street," Ringey says by phone from her Holyoke studio. "I like things that are broken. I like to fix them."

She laughs and says that sounds like she's giving herself away when she talks about her art. And much of what she says has a bit of philosophy between the lines.

"My car got broken into when I was living on Com. Ave in Brighton. Everybody's car got smashed eventually and I was just waiting for my day and hoping they'd leave my stereo. I'd step over other people's glass and think, this was their day. Then, it was my day."

What really surprised her wasn't the broken side window but just how beautiful the glass itself was. She gathered it up and wondered what she could do with it.

"There was an old fridge



Neon and tinted safety glass transform this bidet art piece by Mo Ringey into something quite different.

in my studio staring at me for months and daring me to do something," she says. So she took the chunks of safety glass and covered the entire outside in a crazy quilt mosaic. She also flocked the inside like a jewelry box and now displays the fridge with its door ajar.

"I got so much attention that people started to show up at my door with things like an old wringer washer or a TV," she says. "I have a clinic for abandoned appliances. I give them another life. No appliance turned away."

Ringey looks and sounds a little like Jenna Elfman's Dharma from TV's "Dharma and Greg." She's quick, sometimes silly and a bit unexpected.

After her fridge success she worked on the wringer washing machine and even her father's old mailbox.

"Every winter the snow plows

would knock it down and he would pick it back up. He wanted to win the battle with the snow plow," she says.

Now encrusted in glass, it is displayed permanently open (it's a little shaky from all those snow plow encounters). Everyone looks inside and what they see on the back is a mirror causing them to startle. She says it's apt. "What are you looking for when you open the mail?" she asks somewhat rhetorically.

She's also finished up three retired diner stools and has started work on an ancient urinal she inherited in her latest studio.

A piece that will be at the opening but then taken away is "Narcissivision," which is almost immediately going to Berlin, Germany, for inclusion in the International Assemblage Exhibition. It has already been shown at the Worcester Art Museum and Taber Gallery of Holyoke.

"Narcissivision" is an old Philco TV with its innards replaced by neon and mirrors. It's a take-off, she says, on the real mythological story of Narcissus and not the widely misinterpreted view.

"He was not this good-looking guy who couldn't stop looking at himself," she says. "He was actually extremely insecure. He thought if he looked away he would cease to exist."

Viewers can look past the clouded screen and if they look in just the right spot will catch a distorted glimpse of themselves.

To make her art pieces she uses discarded glass from a company that installs safety glass in store windows. She won't use



Mosaic artist Mo Ringey will bring her latest creations to Provincetown and then Berlin.

glass from accidents since it's associated with violence or crime and is infused with sadness.

She takes the large sheets, puts color stains on and prepares for the breaking part. After wrapping the sheet of thick glass in a cocoon of blankets she hits it on the corner with a hammer until it breaks.

"I have anxiety for two days before," she says. "It can't be cut. It's made by heating and cooling and pouring. It's made to be broken [into tiny pieces]. The idea is that if it breaks you won't die from being stuck by a jagged piece. Sometimes it breaks on the first hit, sometimes on the 20th. I always give a little scream and jump when it breaks which is embarrassing."

What happens next is an unexpected bonus.

"It takes six to seven hours to settle. During that time it makes a sound a little like Rice Krispies. I just turn off the radio and listen."

She has had to find special adhesives and often calls companies used to dealing with NASA who laugh when she tells them she's an artist. She also spends a lot of time in hardware stores begging people to be nice to her as she searches for some very specialized something-or-other that she needs for working the glass.

Her dream? To cover an entire Airstream trailer. A friend even pitched a complex installation idea to the company, who said no, but not immediately. "They thought about it for a month before saying no. That's a huge success," she says.

But, she admits, although she can do almost anything for her art, she's not great at marketing.

"If you spend a lot of time working from one side of your brain, when you try to dance on the other side of the brain, you are swimming in unknown waters.

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