

LIVING

HOLYOKE

Seeing double

HCC gallery opens
2 exhibits by 1 artist

BY CHRIS YURKO

Special to The Republican

The pieces in artist Maryanne Bennis's new show at Holyoke Community College, "Accessories Not Included," look like small versions of the female figureheads that might once have graced the prows of ancient Greek ships.

"These gals are part superhero, part mythological, and all woman," said Bennis. "They are the action figures I wish I had had when I was a girl in the '60s, and the ones I want now."

The pieces in Bennis's other new show, also at HCC, "Curiosities From the Anthropocene and Yonder," incorporate found objects with molded ceramics and reflect the impact of humanity on the planet.



Chicopee artist Maryanne Bennis is the artist behind "Double Your Pleasure," two side-by-side shows on display at Holyoke Community College's Taber Art Gallery. (PHOTO COURTESY HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE)

"I lost my parents, and I lost the home that I grew up in, and so it's sort of the same feeling," said Bennis. "Losing that security of home, but on a bigger scale."

Together, Bennis's two shows at the Taber Art Gallery form one, "Double Your Plea-

sure," which opened on Sept. 26 and runs through Nov. 10.

Taber director Amy Johnquest says putting the two distinct shows in the gallery at the same time adds up to something greater than the sum of their parts.

"Each piece has its own

sensibility and curiosity about it," said Johnquest, "and a viewer could come up with a narrative about what they're looking at that's different than Maryanne's. Each piece stands alone but also works well beside the others. I feel like the two shows talk to each

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Amy Johnquest, Director, Taber Art Gallery

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Bennis, who lives in Chicopee and maintains a studio at Paper City Studios on Race Street in Holyoke, is known primarily for her surrealist ceramic sculpture. She studied visual arts at HCC, which she entered as a nontraditional student in 1998 through the Women in Transition program, now called New Directions for Adult Learners. She graduated with her associate degree in 2002.

"I had my son when I was young and all of my teen years into my 20s were spent focused on paying the bills," Bennis said as she finished installing pieces for her show(s). "When I came here, I was completely lost. But the instructors were really good. Very patient. Being roughly the same age as a lot of the instructors really made a difference because it was like making friends. I felt safe. I felt protected. They answered all my questions no matter

how silly they were. It really means a lot to me to have a show here because this is where I found my voice as an artist. It's kind of like coming home."

For the past seven years, Bennis has been teaching ceramics at senior centers throughout Western Massachusetts as well as online and in studios throughout the Pioneer Valley. Her work has been shown in galleries, museums and hardware stores east of the Mississippi.

The Taber Art Gallery, located in the lobby of the HCC Library on the second floor of the HCC Donahue Building, is free and open to the public Monday through Thursday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. during regular school sessions.

For more information, contact Amy Johnquest at 413-552-2614.

To see more of Bennis's work, visit Maryannebennis.com online or Paper City Studios in person.