

city artists

Harry Stahl's Fantastic "Creatures"

by Jane W. Neubardt

Old typewriter parts, a broken doll's arm, a discarded beer can, old phonograph records, a blow-dryer attachment, half of a Dustbuster, disassembled computer parts, even old bones—sound like useless junk to you? Well it's a veritable treasure trove to White Plains artist Harry Stahl, whose first one-man show opens at Articoli on Oct. 18. In the "wee, wee hours" when most of us are sweetly dreaming, Stahl is squirreled away in his basement studio creating whimsical constructions from so-called "trash" and realizing his own dream: to have fun making art.

Since he was a young boy who loved comic books Stahl has been "making stuff." Back then he created forts for his army men; nowadays he's building table-top size sculptures of "little creatures" made from odds and ends of found objects. "There's more junk than marble in the world," he explains, when asked why he works with other people's discarded stuff.

"I was always best at art in school," says Stahl, a 40-something "Sixties" person, who sports a bushy goatee and long ponytail. Stahl was lucky to have teachers who recognized his talents and encouraged him. He went on to study art at SUNY New Paltz and then the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. Returning to his hometown of Kingston, N.Y., Stahl worked in factories, an experience which he feels had more bearing on his art than his formal schooling. During the day Stahl works as a freelance graphic designer for a major fashion designer in New York City, and he has extensive experience as an illustrator in the commercial art arena.

Full of sprightly energy, Stahl is a cross between a mischievous elf and a mad scientist, merry eyes twinkling beneath wire-rimmed glasses. Describing how he fabricates his imaginative sculptures, he says: "I've kept sketchbooks and journals since I was in eighth grade. I go through my vocabulary of ideas for inspiration on the details of a piece." Drawn to the shape of an object he passes while

walking, Stahl often finds "the seed" of his artwork while beachcombing on vacation. At home he combs through boxes of "junk" that friends often leave on his doorstep.

His figures, with simple names like "Moon Man" and "Snake Guy," have attitude and personality. Stahl describes them as "little gods," and for

him they have a spiritual essence. It's not surprising that Stahl counts homemade shrines among the influences for his work. Many of the pieces have hieroglyphic-like drawings etched onto them, what Stahl calls "deconstructed myths."

Whether there's any real meaning there is entirely up to the viewer. But there really is a wonderful symbiosis between Stahl and his creations—it makes him "blissful" to create them, and

their mirthful idiosyncrasies have an enchanting effect on the viewer.

Stahl's show opens at Articoli (173 Mamaroneck Ave., 328-4590) on Oct. 18 with an opening reception on Oct. 23. Twelve of his playful creations will be displayed and available for purchase in the new downstairs AVA Gallery (Articoli Visual Arts). Stop by and take a peek—Stahl's "creatures" will surely make your day.



Stahl's "Found Object" sculpture can be seen at Articoli beginning October 18.

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