

Nina Rossi



Heavenly Bodies, featuring artwork by Nina

Rossi, opens March 28 and runs through April 30.

Artist Nina Rossi is the real deal. Meeting with Rossi in her Turners Falls home, shared with her adult son Jon Bander, and in which Rossi has spent more than half of her life, is like tumbling into an action-packed Alice-in-Wonderland dream of personal and intense homages to family, self, and the human condition. Rossi's gritty life path and deep observations, which could be the stories of many people, are filtered through her rich and imaginative inner life, translating into art that is powerful, accessible and terrifically unique.

Texturing even her main living spaces, Rossi's art is multi-media and multi-dimensional paintings, clay, fabric, molded mice sculptures, "junk sculpture" and bass guitars (Rossi plays in the all-female rock band She Said and the Beatle's Nerds). Son Jon's welded sculptures claim a large amount of floor space in the dining room.

Moving through to her two third floor studio spaces (a construction room and a sewing room) the visitor encounters a maelstrom of materials, adhesive and molding compounds, and power tools.

Rossi's materials include, but are definitely not limited to metal, wax, resin, clay, wood, fabric, "found materials", and a glorious tangle of industrial bits and pieces. "Things find me. I find things." She frequents the Turners Falls shop Loot, and watches for odd pieces as she moves through the

world. One of the quirkiest of her recent finds is a cast iron baby's arm that appears to have once



been attached to a larger object.

Rossi has been a member of the Shelburne Artist's Cooperative since 1997. She continues to exhibit her highly-textured mixed media wall paintings and figure drawings; dolls made of old bottle caps, cogs, old condiment tins, faux jewels; tiny, happy slugs; decorated mirrors, tire handbags, and jewelry made of hand sewn and polymer beads

Born in Chicago, where Rossi lived until she was 7 years old before moving to Baltimore, in both places she went to Saturday morning art lessons. Her parents, both sociologists: her father doing survey design and evaluation, and her mother a founder of the National Organization of Women and specializing in family, sexuality, gender and feminism. "My work" says Rossi, "has that kind of sociological vision. This is where my perspective comes from."

Early on Rossi was drawn to sculpting, and cartooning. And, she explains, "public school was not kind to my rebellious, artistic creativity. I was a cartoonist early on. It was bawdy, humorous always." She visited the principal's office more than once because of her cartoons.



"Withdrawn, an outcast, I was always doing art", said Rossi, who would create dolls and dollhouses, "making miniature worlds come to life. I cobbled and hacked my way through. It was a mental health thing, really."

Her parents moved them to Amherst when they took positions at UMass. At 15 she began drinking. "I was not used to the college town culture I was dropped into in Amherst. It was a rich, privileged culture. Alcohol was a link to the rest of the world, a path to communication." At 16 she got

her own apartment “where it was all about the drinking diet”. Within a short time she moved to Provincetown during “the last gasp of the fishing industry”, where she ran the winch in a fishing wharf, a male-dominated place. “It was a sucky, sucky job. It was a really hard environment”.

Said Rossi, “I was used to risky behavior. I moved in with a guy, an abusive Vietnam Vet, and became his ‘old lady’ at 17.” At 19 Rossi tried to leave the relationship, but through a series of circumstances was unable to leave. “At 26, I was able to escape.” Rossi returned home, where she got her Class 2 License, and then, a job at Pelham Auto Workers Cooperative where she managed the auto parts store. “It was a family, a good place to be. There was love, appreciation in what was again a male environment. It appealed to that rebellious, contrary issue of mine”.



It was there that she met her first husband, and, in 1987 she bought her house in the former industrial town of Turner Falls, located halfway up the hill, At this time it gives her both quiet space in which to create, and a connection to the lively and downtown Turners Falls community.

During this time Rossi had two sons, and with the help of her parents, took night classes at Greenfield Community College with the initial goal of becoming a reference librarian. “It’s the search for information in both.” She segued into the Art Program and received her AS in Studio Art. She followed this up by being accepted into the Ada Comstock Program at Smith College and receiving her BA there. Studying mostly history, science and creative writing she won awards in several prestigious poetry contests. Unable initially to find a job after graduating, Rossi for a year ran a brown bag lunch service out of her kitchen, for private school students (they called her “The Lunch Fairy”).

Subsequently Rossi worked as Production Manager, Fabricator and Inventory Manager at Eddie’s Pet Wheels; she wrote the Art Scene column for The Recorder for three years; and freelances as a graphic designer as well as creating her art and creating the ever-changing little gallery she founded in Turners Falls in 2011, the five-foot-wide Nina’s Nook. Although she still does piece work for Eddie’s Wheels, cutting aluminum at home for their CNC machine, she no longer punches a time clock there. Instead, she is features editor, writer and illustrator for the Montague Reporter, a weekly community newspaper, and has her gallery and occasional graphic design job to round out the economic picture.



For the current show of her work, “Heavenly Bodies” at the Coop this April, Rossi has pulled parts out of her vast collection of miscellany to create flying figures. Although they can be called angels, as you might imagine these are not your typical religious type angels. With saw blade wings and holding tools, these are “angels” who rise above the earth by virtue of their mad skills and imagination. Accompanying these flying figures are bas relief clouds that are back-lit with LED lighting strips. To accompany these pieces are framed figure drawings that Rossi has made in her unique, abstract geometric style. In this show, Rossi celebrates the corporeal and the ethereal in a lively mixture of materials and styles. Humor and honesty prevail.

Enjoy a reception for the show on Sunday, April 8 from 2 to 4 p.m. Enjoy refreshments and music from Uncle Hal’s Crabgrass band!