

Arts Council of Rockland

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Life

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Life Arts FOR Happenings

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"Then and Now"

On Exhibit at St. Thomas Aquinas College Rockland Artists Reflect on Personal Evolution

"Then and Now," an exhibition at the Azarian-McCullough Art Gallery located on the campus of St. Thomas Aquinas College (STAC), will be on display from February 24 - March 30. The exhibition features works of several Rockland artists. (For details, see calendar, page 4.) The title of the show, "Then and Now," generated reflections of the artists that are as unique as their artwork. Below, the exhibition's curator, Adele Myers, and two of the participating artists, Harriet Hyams and Eric David Laxman, offer their perspectives on "then and now."

HARRIET HYAMS

THEN

"I was an English major in college who took a few painting courses," said the 78 year old resident of Snedens Landing. After college, Ms. Hyams continued to paint but noted, "I couldn't get the paint thick enough. I kept making it thicker and thicker until the paint brush didn't work and I had to apply it with a palette knife." She moved through artistic media from paint to more solid materials - clay, terra cotta, wood, stone, glass and steel "but," she said, "ultimately it was light and color that I wanted to work with." Ms. Hyams believes this progression came from her personal life experiences. During her early years of working as an artist, she was married to a physician. "It was a marriage that didn't work. I was feeling powerless. I was supposed to be 'Mrs. Doctor.' But I wasn't living the life I was supposed to. I was looking for strength, to show my power," she said. "I felt wonderful using a hammer and chisel, grinder and welding torch. The art helped me to cope. It saved me."



NOW

After a long and successful artistic career in stained glass design with many exhibitions and significant commissions, Ms. Hyams has transformed the circumstances of her life. She ended her first marriage and is now married to a man "who respects me and is proud of my work." Their home bears witness to this. Light streams through large windows in a house that nestles into the foot of the palisades by the Hudson River. Her art and works by others adorn the elegant home.

Ms. Hyams most recent significant commissions were two large stained glass windows that are installed in the Jersey City Medical Center. Describing the project in an article in *The Stained Glass Quarterly* (fall, 2006), Ms. Hyams, a native of Jersey City, wrote, "I hope I haven't come full circle yet, as beginnings and endings can be vague and mysterious. I'd rather think in terms of spirals, which is a circuitous way of starting an article about round windows and the inspiration for the spirals in my windows in the new Jersey City Medical Center . . . Jersey City is a much maligned city. I've never heard anyone proudly say that's where they're from, including myself. It usually takes years for an acquaintance to admit to having lived there. It definitely was a place to leave." She goes on to outline her personal and artistic history as they relate to the hospital, her home town and the two windows named "Hope" and "Healing" (see photographs).

"I've always been attracted to spirals," she wrote. "I'd read about the chambered nautilus" (the marine creature sometimes referred to as a "living fossil" whose spiraled form inspired the aptly titled poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Chambered Nautilus" with its oft-quoted line - "Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul."). "I own several nautilus shells and fossils that I've been looking at for years. Here was the opportunity to use these marvelous shapes in a hospital setting."

Ms. Hyams' 49 year artistic career includes her original stained glass located in the:

- sanctuary of The Jewish Chapel at West Point
- Dominican Chapel, Our Lady of the Rosary in Sparkill
- World Headquarters of Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich Inc., in Orlando, Florida
- The Other Woman, a world class ocean going yacht

Reflecting on her body of work, Ms. Hyams said, "If I never do another piece of art, I don't need to prove my strength. I can stand up for myself. I can say what I need to say. I've been fortunate to make choices for myself. I took risks."

One of the risks she takes relates to her age - at times, Ms. Hyams has been hesitant to reveal it. "Some people think that at artist who is 78 is at the end of her career," she said. Ms. Hyams not only clearly announces her age, she demonstrates that her artistic career and vision continue to dynamically evolve regardless of age.

ERIC DAVID LAXMAN