

Art Preview

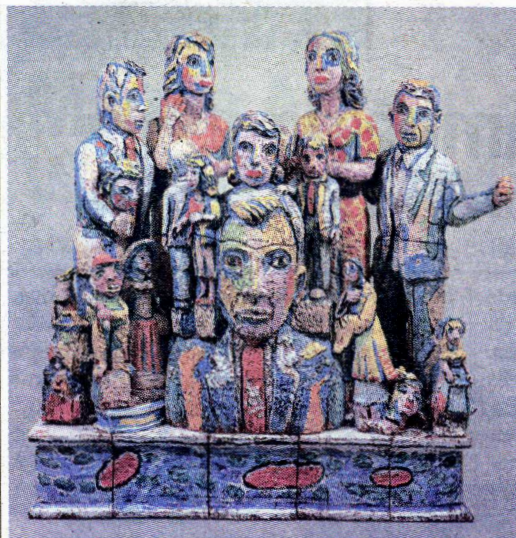
Castoff Art

BY PEGGY SUE DUNIGAN

The imaginative aesthetics of throwaways, castoffs and found objects that Viola Frey (1933-2004) molded in clay determined her celebrated artistic career. Raised on California farmland during the 1930s and '40s, when many of these flea-market objects could be found, Frey incorporated these materials into her increasingly monumental figurative sculptures. She eventually began to transform ceramics into fine-art sculptures.

The premiere retrospective "Bigger, Better, More: The Art of Viola Frey," a collaboration between the Racine Art Museum (RAM) and Toronto's Gardiner Museum, opens at RAM on April 24 (through Aug. 16) to explore the contributions Frey made to the art world over her 40-year career. These 20 pieces, be it bricolage sculptures or enormous ceramic figures, revisit elements of Warhol's double imagery, Rauschenberg's collage techniques and Oldenburg's oversized installations. The exhibition provides a glimpse into the processes of this very private artist who achieved acclaim through more than 50 shows at national institutions, including New York's Museum of Arts and Design, the Whitney Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Through her long career inspired by Charles Fiske, her former instructor who eventually became her life partner, Frey invoked an interdisciplinary approach to art. Using her training in painting, drawing, bronze and sculpture, she elevated the clay medium to an art form. Her work increasingly juxtaposed collections from thrift stores and junkyards, and recycled them into fine-art work that Frey felt "restored dignity and integrity



Viola Frey, *Family Portrait* (above), *Double Portrait* (left)

venues along Vliet Street (beginning at the 4300 block) and the village of Wauwatosa showcase artists and merchants who demonstrate how to invest in creativity every day. This includes Tim Decker, an animator, illustrator and painter who worked on children's entertainment for "Imagination Station." He appears at Noodles & Co. on Saturday afternoon. Along with discovering fresh artistic ideas, enjoy free music and fun eateries on Friday, 5 to 9 p.m., and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

to the castoff."

Her figurative works explore the strong women Frey encountered as a child, especially her grandmothers, and those at galleries or museums that encouraged her creative life. Progressively moving forward with her ceramic sculptures, she increasingly united the more abstract applications of glazes to the classical appeal of the large-scale nude she crafted in her *Weeping Woman* (1991), a 6-foot seated figure. Experience these larger-than-life works on First Fridays, including May 1, when RAM offers free admission from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., along with a free hands-on art project planned from 4 to 8 p.m. to coordinate with the exhibition.

On April 24-25 the Westside Artwalk presents "The Art of Living" as