



Margaret Brandt / Herald staff

Artist Bert Leveille stands with one of her "fantasy" art pieces featured along with several other of her works during March at Judson College in Elgin.

Artist turns fantasy world into art reality

By Danielle Aceto
Herald staff writer

ELGIN — When her teddy bear drawing wasn't good enough for the second-grade classroom bulletin board, artist Bert Leveille figured, "This is it. Forget it." A career in art down the drain. Washed up at 7 years old.

Not quite. Though for the next several years she would pursue a career in acting, Leveille eventually found her niche in the art world. She entered Elmhurst College as a drama major and left with a degree in fine art.

"I fully intended to go into drama," she says. "Elmhurst had a small but spirited drama department and I liked that. But I found the same spirit in the art department and the expression was so much easier for me. In drama, I was inhibited."

Rebellious by nature, Leveille reveled in the freedom coming with artistic expression. After all, the work was her own. She could set the parameters. "It gave me a sense of independence that I

didn't know existed," she said.

From the start, Leveille found herself drawn to the abstract in its most extreme sense. Relying almost exclusively on her subconscious to supply the images for her watercolor and acrylic paintings, she took care in insuring that they retained a "generic" quality.

"If someone saw a recognizable image in my work, I would blot it out," she said. "I wanted it all to come from the subconscious."

And though her subconscious still for the most part dictates her images, Leveille now finds herself "making a conscious effort" to allow some recognizable forms to come through — literally.

Take for example, her free-form canvases pieces, some of which feature three-dimensional characters sculptured directly onto the surface of the paintings.

These figures, she says, are from her subconscious world. They have personalities of their own and exist in an environment which, depending on your

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interpretation, may or may not exist.

"I felt these characters wanted to get off the canvas," she says. "This was a way of letting them off."

With her recent dabbling in sculpture, Leveille has gone a step further, giving these characters a complete three-dimensional world to work in.

"It's been a progression from canvas to full 3-D," she said. "I think an artist has to keep pushing their work. I don't want to be comfortable....Part of my art is experimental, with holes and lines. It's like a language. Just like a writer has to build a vocabulary of words, an artist has to build a vocabulary of images."

The holes Leveille refers to are actual tears in her free-form canvases.

"They bring the pieces together in that a person could be looking at one piece and see another," she said.

Which in the end is what Leveille is after. "Everyone looks at things differently," she says. "I don't like to prejudice people about what to think of my work. That's part of the beauty of abstract art. People see what they want to see."