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This Deborah Masters Both Sculpture and Politics

By Raanan Geberer

Many Downtown Brooklyn residents know Deborah Masters only as one of the staff members who answers the phones and works on constituent projects at Councilman Ken Fisher's office. But Deborah Masters is also a sculptor who has exhibited at such famous venues as the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Brooklyn Museum, and who has done commission work in cities from California to New Hampshire.

Ms. Masters, whose joint sculpture studio and living quarters are located in the "Dumbo" area that is home to many Brooklyn artists, says she took the job with Fisher partially because she isn't receiving that much money for her MTA project. However, she is still dedicated to the project, producing reliefs that will be embedded onto the Brighton Beach Line's concrete elevated structure near Ocean Parkway. The reliefs, in panels, address "beach" themes: King Neptune, dolphins, crowds at Coney Island, and more.

Ms. Masters was born in Harrisburg, Pa., and graduated Bryn Mawr

in 1974. She started exhibiting sculpture while still in school. "I always had a three-dimensional orientation, and was considering architecture and engineering as well as sculpture," she says.

She moved to Manhattan after school, but moved to Brooklyn about 20 years ago. "I wanted to live in a city, but felt that Manhattan had a crazy atmosphere with so many people running around," she recalls. She thus became one of the original artists to move into "Dumbo," the area between the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges. Now, the area abounds with artists, especially visual artists like Deborah.

Ms. Masters began exhibiting in Brooklyn soon after she moved here, and participated in group shows at both the Brooklyn Museum and BACA in 1984. She served as curator for another group show, "Divisions/Decisions" at the Federal Courthouse in 1986, and participated in the "Urban Figures" show at the Whitney in 1988.

She also has mounted one-woman shows at a variety of locations ranging from Humboldt State University,

Humboldt, Calif. (1990) to Brooklyn Union Gas here (1992).

Ms. Master's sculptures are striking, many of them larger than life-size. She takes this reporter on a tour of her space, paying attention to each of the sculptures. One showing a sculpted woman sitting in a wooden bathtub, which she also constructed. Another piece, "Like Bracciano," shows women at the beach, and was inspired by one of her many trips to Italy. Yet another piece, depicting a woman holding a dog, was inspired by the death of one of her own dogs, she says.

In her studio, she shows how she creates the reliefs that will eventually decorate the elevated subway. She makes a small drawing, then a life-size drawing. Then, she creates the sculpture on top of the drawing itself.

How did Ms. Masters get to Fisher's office? "I come from a political family, she says, "and my mother was involved with Planned Parenthood and other groups. I helped to organize the Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition, and then got involved in the effort to change the loft

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This is neither the head of John the Baptist nor the head of Holofernes, but Deborah Masters' sculpture *Pieta*. The piece is part of a group show on "crime" currently at the Soho Impression Gallery at 520 Broadway, Manhattan.