

ART AND ARTISTS

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Judy Onofrio



Judy Onofrio
Big Catch, 1996
 ceramic, wood, shell, glass, paint and metal
 74 x 34 1/2 x 27 1/12 in.

[WAM](#)

About the Art

Big Catch is filled with chaotic forms, joyous colors and elaborate textures. Artist Judy Onofrio covers the surface of the [sculpture](#) with colorful and reflective objects that give her work a jeweled effect. A closer look reveals that the "jewels" are actually common cast-off materials: bottle caps, beads, shells, broken mirror pieces, broken china, pop top tabs and marbles added to completely cover the form. In her three dimensional [assemblage](#), Onofrio uses other surprising [kitsch](#) objects like a flower paperweight, Abraham Lincoln and Paul Bunyan figurines, and a decorative thermometer imbedded into the surface. Her obsessive collecting and re-use of discarded objects is a method shared by some other self-taught, [outsider](#) or [visionary artists](#).

Onofrio's elaborate surface is directly tied to rich meaning and content. From the top of the [sculpture](#), a large serpent displays pointed teeth made of nails and a long pink tongue carved of wood. A smaller snake, covered with silver studs, encircles it. Several birds made of painted tin perch around the form and are balanced by a cluster of tropical-looking flowers covered with

beads. The entire composition is raised up on a [pedestal](#) covered with a [mosaic](#) of broken glass and china.

Onofrio describes the process of creating her large playful sculptures, "The first part of construction is building the architecture to create a stage, as a set-up to house a [narrative](#). Arches, [pedestals](#), porches, and columns are the framework for [shrines](#) reminiscently religious, yet ultimately a personal and invented space. The central figures are created primarily of wood and later are surfaced with detailed embellishments. Men, women, birds, fish and animals assume characters that become engaged in various relationships of seduction, balance, duality, and temptation. The [narrative](#) evolves with the addition of found objects that add to the [content](#) and meaning of the work. The story unfolds as these elements add another layer of description."

Onofrio's elaborate surface is directly tied to rich meaning and [content](#). She enjoys creating images that engage people in looking, imagining and interpreting. She says, "I am interested in adding layers of information and ambiguity. Lots of times asking more questions than giving answers."

Asked about the images used in *Big Catch*, Onofrio shared what the sculpture means to her. "Several summers ago I went on vacation and was asked by an old friend to go fishing in his canoe. I have always loved to fish, since I was a child. I haven't had many opportunities in recent years so this was a great adventure. As we left everyone around the cabin, my husband included, laughed at us, and said all we were going to catch was mosquitoes. Well-armed with that challenge we took off and I caught a huge large mouth bass, a Northern, and a few pan-fish. The guy I was with was an avid fisherman, never caught one.

"Returning to the cabin, everybody was out in the lawn expecting to give us a good kidding. Victoriously I lifted my catch. What this meant to me was, I could accomplish anything I decide to do. *Big Catch* was about a feeling of personal triumph. Much of my work is based on a particular story. Often they are common things that happen in everyday life. The big "serpent" is really my huge fish with the twist of sharp teeth and a seductive mouth all at the same time." Onofrio's large [sculpture](#) captures a fond memory and for her, celebrates it like a playful trophy.

Vocabulary Terms

architecture--The art of creating buildings and spaces, or the built structure and its elements.

assemblage--Work of art made from natural or pre-made objects; usually a three-dimensional wall hanging or freestanding work.

content--The subject, theme or central meaning communicated by or through an artwork.

grotto--an artificial cave, or special space created using stone or cement and often used as a shrine.

kitsch--Cheap decorative objects or souvenirs.

mosaic--A technique of decorating a surface by covering it with small pieces, usually stone or glass, and filling the space between them with grout.

narrative--A story.

outsider artist--Self-taught artists who create artworks for their own joy and desire rather than to be a part of the established fine art world and market.

pedestal--A raised column on which something is displayed, protected and/or celebrated.

sculpture--Artwork with three dimensions: height, width and depth.

shrine--A container, space or site made sacred by association with venerated objects or persons.

visionary artist--Self-taught artists who create artworks from their own personal visions and desires, often creating unique and obsessive imagery.

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