

Mike Wright works outside the box

By Sue Harrison
BANNER STAFF

Mike Wright is a woman who could be described as working outside the box — the box of self, that is. Her trademark assemblages have gone from jam-packed boxes crafted from washed-up wood on the beaches to boxes whose contents have escaped, reflecting what she believes is her own artistic and personal path of growth.

"I always felt I never quite fit in, that I was boxed," Wright says, offering an explanation for some of her earlier work. "In Japan, the image for a woman is a box or a square, so maybe subliminally I have used it to represent me, chaos inside of a square me. I've used it to find myself. Now a lot happens outside the box."

Wright, winner of the 1998 Provincetown Art Association and Museum national competition, has a one-woman show opening at PAAM tomorrow. (The 1999 winner will be chosen the same night.) She also shows at Cortland Jessup's galleries in town and in New York.

Much of her most recent work still has echoes of the box, and for

this show her pieces are an homage to the Provincetown fishing fleet — specifically, the boats that have been lost or removed from service.

It's been a twisting journey for Wright, from Baltimore to Provincetown and from elementary school teacher to artist. From an early age she was drawn to art and must have shown talent, because the nuns at her Catholic school were always asking her to draw illustrations for them. "They always made me draw Blessed Mary for the bulletin board," she says. "Or, they'd say, 'We need a Christ.'"

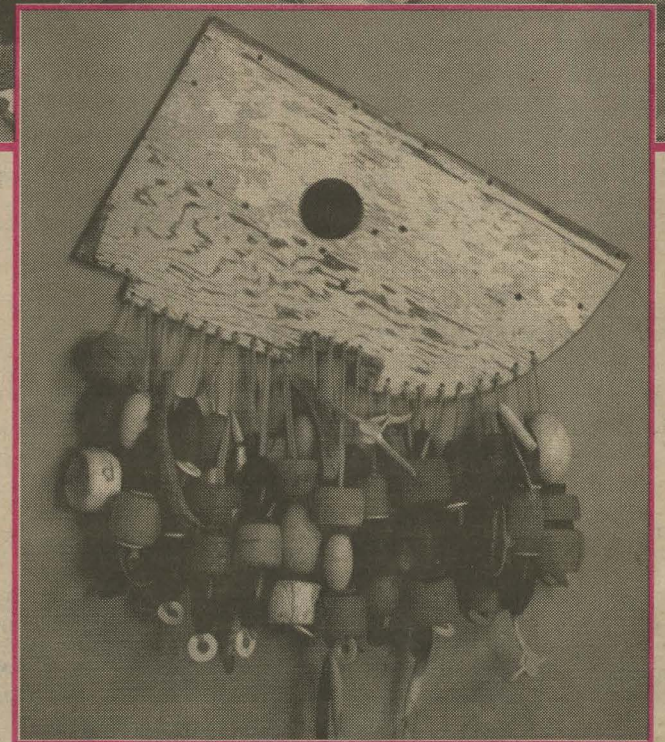
She studied art education in college and taught art at an elementary school in the farm country outside of Baltimore, but she wasn't satisfied because, she says, "I needed to make some art." She went into graphic design and after a number of years combined a desire to move to Provincetown with the desire for a really big project, a guest house. In 1984 she bought Plums and operated it until its sale earlier this year.

"I avoided the right brain for a long time," is how Wright put it. "I did a lot of left brain stuff, commer-

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Photo Vincent Guadagno
Sculptor Mike Wright's one-woman show at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum stems from her winning PAAM's national competition last year.



"Charm #1"

Photo Jim Zimmerman

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Mike Wright

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Exhibition for national competition winner

By Mary-Jo Avellar

An exhibition of the work of Mike Wright, winner of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum's National Competition, will open Friday with a reception from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Wright, former owner of Plums Guest House, is the first local person to win the competition in several years. She was chosen from a field of 150 applicants nationwide.

She is thrilled, as is Robyn Watson, the association's executive director. "I saw the first construction Mike Wright ever made," Watson wrote in the exhibition catalog. "I have watched carefully as they grew large or smaller like Alice, as they flirted with dories and buoys, as they sought for and found the square insert that is now their signature. Sometimes I feel like their aunt!"

A former graphic artist and teacher from Baltimore, Wright moved to Provincetown, giving up her career in art 16 years ago, when she bought Plums.

Like so many others who move to Provincetown, Wright wanted to own her own business and be independent. "I decided to focus on the left side of my brain, rather than the right side, the artistic side," she said. "I put art aside."

Owning and operating a guest house became a creative experience for Wright, who painted the guest house trim a pale lavender, but decorated the grounds with buoys and the nautical flotsam that now is the focus of her assemblage work.

Wright agrees that the nautical motif and the pale lavender was an odd juxtaposition, but her collection paid off when she decided in January to sell the guest house to focus on her work.

The assemblage pieces she will exhibit at the association pay homage to her love of the sea and the fishermen whom she admires immensely for their willingness to brave the elements for a life she knows is extremely difficult.

Oddly enough, Wright, who is obsessed with the fishing fleet and its paraphernalia, cannot go out on boats. She gets seasick.

"I get seasick, so I don't go out on the water, but I love things on the water," she said. "All this wood looks like it has had a hard life, which is symbolic of the fishing fleet's demise."

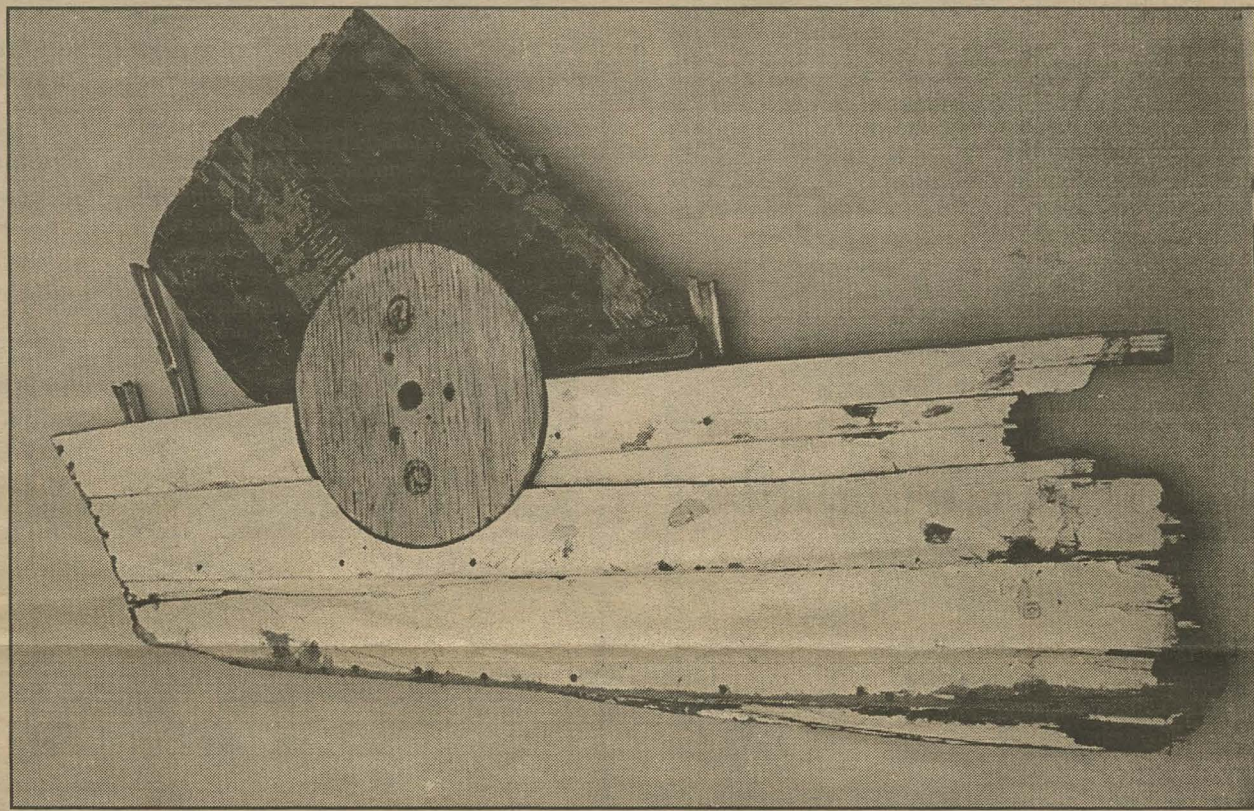
Everyday Wright walks the beaches looking for the materials she will use in her work. She even stood on the deck of the Little Natalia, Isaque da Lomba's fishing boat, when it was tied up to Cabral's prior to being sunk. She pried off several pieces of wood from

the vessel, which was used in one of the exhibition's signature pieces and which is also pictured on the postcard announcing the exhibit.

Wright said during the years she owned her guest house, she began taking watercolor classes, but nothing really fit. It wasn't until 1993, when she took a

diminishing fishing fleet, but also communicate a greater vulnerability affecting everyone who lives on this fragile peninsula," he said.

After graduating from the Baltimore school system, Wright attended Towson State University in Towson, Md. She also took classes at the Maryland



A Mike Wright construction

summer class at the association with Paul Bowen, an assemblage sculptor, that she found her niche.

"I like the physicalness, the drilling, hammering, sawing wood and dragging things off the beach," she said. "It feels right, not that I won't go back to painting."

Bowen calls her pieces gentle icons. "She allows the dignity and eloquence of the chosen fragments to be revealed through minimal carpentry," he said. "These sculptures, which pay homage to the passing of the fleet, are named after boats no longer in our harbor due to disaster, neglect or purchase by the government buy-back program."

It is a cruel irony, Bowen said, that in the 100 years artists have been inspired by fishing, their industry should flounder as the arts flourish.

"Wright's gentle, peeling icons not only honor the

Institute, a prestigious art school also attended by film director John Waters, whom she knew then by sight. Her parents and two sisters still live in Baltimore, are very supportive and visit Provincetown regularly. One of her sisters will attend the exhibition. Wright, who really is named Michael because her mother loved the name, lives with Sheila McGuinness, her partner of seven years, and two Boston terriers Tula and Cleo, who were rescued dogs. They will be moving in August to Missoula, Mont., where McGuinness, a poet, author and editor of Cape Women, has been accepted into a two-year MFA program in poetry.

During her years in Provincetown, Wright has been involved with committee work, was an officer in the Provincetown Business Guild, Women Innkeepers and now serves on the Visitors Services Board.

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Mike Wright shows at 4Cs' gallery

“Continuum,” an exhibition of contemporary modernist sculpture by Provincetown artist Mike Wright, is being presented by The Higgins Gallery at Cape Cod Community College from Oct. 19 through Nov. 13.

Wright will give a gallery talk at 1 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 29, in the Tilden Arts Center lobby. Everyone is welcome to pack a lunch and join this informal brown bag presentation.

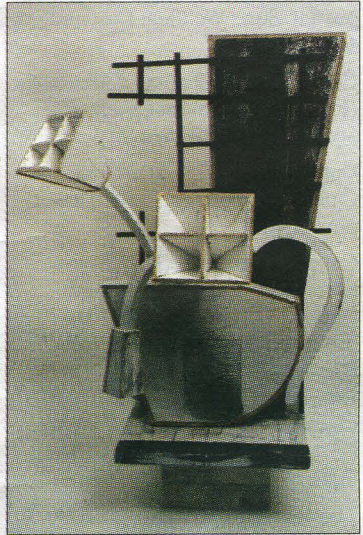
With humor and grace, Wright pays homage to the working past of the Provincetown community, viewing her work as part of the continuum of Provincetown art history. Using the process of assemblage, she collects salvaged, discarded wood remnants of the fishing fleet and old local homes and creates modernist sculptures.

In her artist statement, Wright says, “What I am after is a series of reference points, a picture that is bigger than our one moment in history. I am glad to be on the continuum as well. From the painted wooden salvage scavenged from the beach, I assemble a rough poetry of form. The scratches, peeling and discoloration constitute a unique visual record — a secret history — of wood as boat, as house, as container. Without disguising evidence of the past, these idiosyncratic pieces of Provincetown have a dramatic new existence. Though non-objective sculptures, they reference the classical or the geometric language of cubism or

even the modernist aesthetic in a contemporary idiom.”

She lives in Provincetown with her partner, Sheila Sinead McGuinness, and is represented by the Julie Heller Gallery.

The Higgins Gallery is located in the Tilden Arts Center at Cape Cod Community College, 2240 Iyannough Road, West Barnstable.



Mike Wright pays homage to the past with assemblage patterned after drawings and paintings from a generation ago, like “After Warthen’s Drawing.”

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