



Ann Carrington sculpting a shell for one of her shell ladies (opposite)

The lady who sculpts

Jo Scott steps into the world of local artist, Ann Carrington, who is behind the Margate shell lady

Stepping into the Carrington family home is like entering a jewel box; everywhere you look is a riot of colour and shape. Jars of kaleidoscopic buttons are arranged like rows of boiled sweets; a brilliantly coloured 100-year-old Austrian crochet rug hangs on the wall; piles of cockle shells rest in the corner as though washed up by a huge tide; bone-handled knives, fashioned into bisons' horns, sit alongside bronze daemonic-faced hares, with evening glove

ears. This is the crazy and lovely world of local artist Ann Carrington.

Ann studied painting at Birmingham Art College, leaving with a first-class degree in Fine Art, but felt her work, "though technically admirable, lacked excitement and that extra essence that brings art alive". It was while working on her sketchbooks at home that she decided on a change of direction to more sculptural forms.

Always an avid collector, Ann has developed a child's hobby into a source

for her three-dimensional pieces. "My sculptural inspiration comes from my sketch books and diaries. These books are an obsessive documentation of my life; a collection of ephemera that has passed through my hands; coins, train tickets, sweet and fruit wrappers; snippets of magazines, girls' comics, postcards," she explains. "They contain everything that inspired and interested me and were central to my creative life, so it seemed logical to develop what was two dimensional

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into something three dimensional through sculpture.'

There is a lack of affectation to Ann's character which is utterly beguiling and you can well imagine how this openness, and almost naivety, appealed to the board at the Royal College of Art when she applied for a place on the prestigious sculpture class. "I had never created a piece of sculpture and could barely name more than one current sculptor, but I had my books and my passion.

"Once there, I just flew. I knew this was exactly where I needed to be, and what I had felt was a missing ingredient with Fine Art came through. I started making tin-can cars and oil-can planes." Just two short years later, Ann won the Herbert Read Award and the Commonwealth Fellowship for Sculpture, and saw half of her final show snapped up by the designer Paul Smith. Ann doesn't get massive publicity, nor does she court it, but her client list includes Elton John and Gwyneth Paltrow.

Currently working out of the Limbo Workshop in Margate, Ann's vision for Margate is a permanent giant 10-feet high shell lady sculpture fabricated from bronze that would become a permanent focal point for The Old Town. "What would be remarkable and witty about the sculpture would be its scale, as the shell lady is granted all the civic respect of a local hero," she says.

Mrs Booth, as she is to be known (a reference to Turner's Margate mistress), will be accompanied by an entourage of twelve, elegant and rather supercilious, ladies. The ladies will promenade on high days and holidays, as the fancy takes them. Visit www.theshellady.co.uk for appearance dates. There is so much more to say about Ann and her work: her scholarship trip to Zimbabwe, the sell-out exhibition in Harare, a tour of African Art around the UK, the almost-published book of tin planes (on ice since the American publisher withdrew post 9/11), her commissions for Paul Smith, Issey Miyake and Lulu Guinness, but no one article could encompass everything.

Fortunately, Ann has a comprehensive website - www.anncarrington.co.uk - where a full gallery of her work, and much more, is featured. ■



One of Ann Carrington's shell ladies graces Margate harbour

Photograph: Ann Carrington