

# Celebrating strong, courageous women

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**MADISON** » A mixed media collage showing 1,000 square foot sails woven from the wool of 200 sheep over four years by Viking women for ships they would never navigate. Another with multiple images spanning a century showing nurses in the Spanish American War, a suffragette, and women's rights trailblazer Anita Hill. Handmade lace symbolizing the anonymous work of women.

It's all part of "Myth Redrawn: Strong, Courageous Women," an exhibit comprising 25 works chronicling the challenges and successes of women through the ages by local artist B. Joan Hickey.

The fantastical exhibit will begin with an opening reception on Sept. 27 in the Mary C. Daly Gallery at Mercy by the Sea in Madison, with a silent auction to benefit Mercy Center, a spirituality center offering renewal programs for personal and professional growth, and will continue through Nov. 12.

"This has been my passion and focus for the last 22 years," said the intense, animated 73-year-old amid an array of landscape watercolors at her sun-splashed Guilford studio on a recent afternoon. "That so often, too often, women's work, their contributions, go unrecognized, undocumented, uncelebrated."

It's the consequent "burden of anger," as she terms it in "Myth Redrawn," her book accompanying the exhibit with commentary on each piece, that motivated her, through the medium of collage, to elevate the accomplishments of women to the level of icons.

It's the same burden that she's carried since her childhood in Marblehead, Mass.

Her father, a high school football coach, tasked himself with "sending young men to college," she said; for his daughters he "didn't have the same vision." Her mother, after working at General Electric assembling parts for airplanes during World War II and earning enough money to buy herself a Model T Ford, grew frustrated after being sent home.

Hence, her collage, "Another Nickel Tip," that pictures the scowling faces of Etruscan sculptures among lace caps, aprons, and nurses.

The purpose: to represent the devaluation of women's work within the home, managing the household and family. "Do you work?" in this culture means outside the home," Hickey, who studied Spanish and Art at the University of Massachusetts, writes in her commentary. "The subtext is that only paid work is valued."

Said the Guilford resident, in explaining the inclusion of a waitress with a wearied expression: "I also want it to demonstrate the anger I feel, that the waitress feels, that women feel, that when we are paid, we're paid less than men."

And even "women who work out-



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In "Should a Mother Continue to Model," Victorian ladies and first woman astronaut Sally Ride vie for visual attention.

side the home, full-time," she added, "still spend three times the amount of time on household chores than men."

Likewise, the collage with a scrap of newspaper from the 1960s questioning "Should a Mother Continue to Model?" juxtaposed with an image of Sally Ride, the American astrophysicist and first American woman in space who, as Hickey put it, in 1983 "blast[ed] through the glass ceiling."

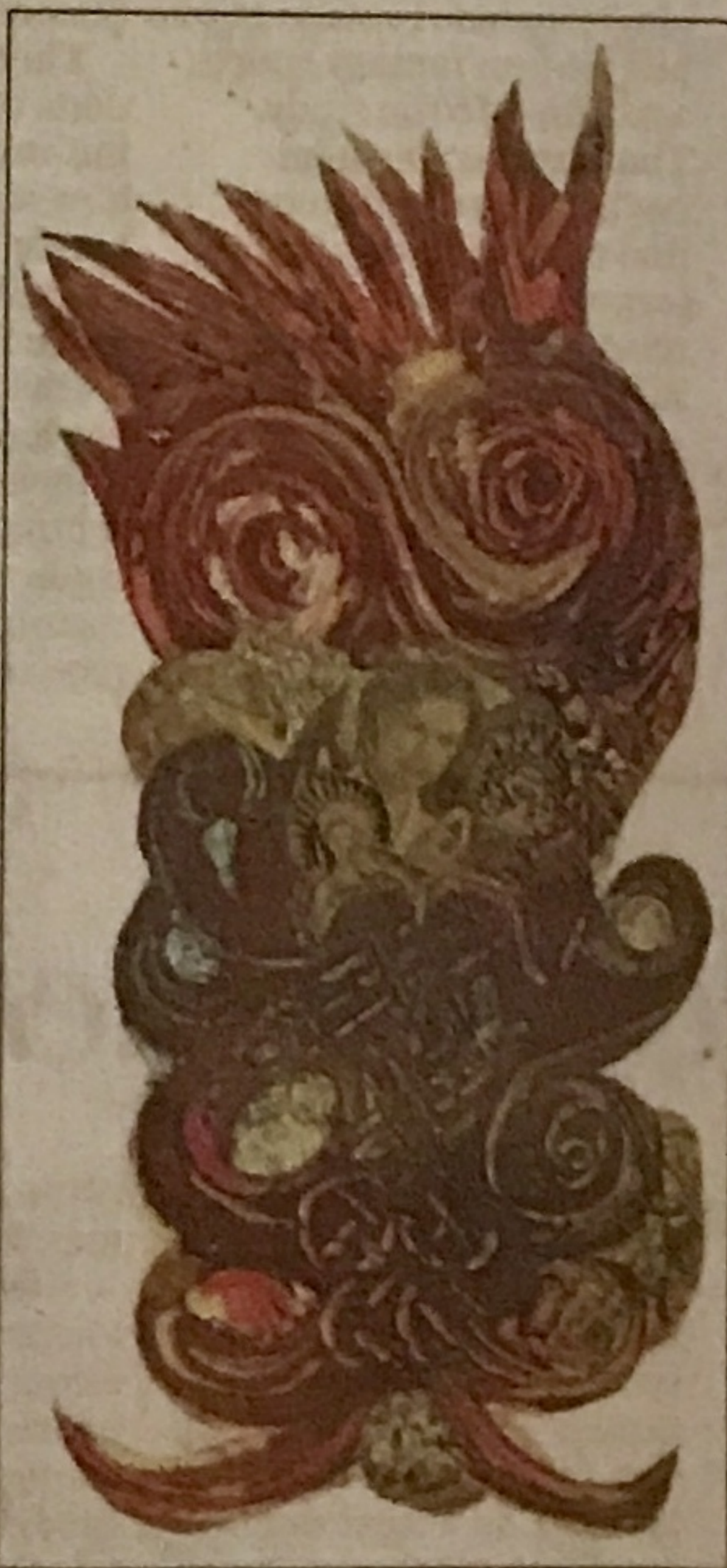
It's all of a piece with Hickey's larger concern: to both animate the struggle and triumph of women through time and to stimulate young women to set high expectations for themselves and, through education and training, meet them.

As Hickey, the founding director of the Center for Creative Youth at Wesleyan University, says in her commentary: "It is women like Gloria Steinem who empower us to be our own versions of Wonder Woman."

While some may find the ideas inspiring the exhibit far-fetched or illusory — it's unlikely that most women see themselves as heroines, much less Wonder Woman — there's no denying Hickey's noble, deeply felt mission.

"Those Viking women who wove the sails never went anywhere," she said. "I want to take every opportunity to remind young girls, women, whether with my art or through my words, that with hard work they can go anywhere. And they don't have to be invisible."

The exhibit will be on view from Sept. 27 through Nov. 12 in the Mary C. Daly, RSM Gallery at Mercy by the Sea, 167 Neck



"Another Nickel" collage.

Road, Madison. An opening reception will be held on Sunday, Sept. 27 from 4-6 p.m. The event, which is free and open to the public, includes a silent auction to benefit Mercy by the Sea.

Visit [www.mercybythesea.org](http://www.mercybythesea.org) or call 203-245-0401 for more information about the opening reception and other events planned in conjunction with the exhibit.

"Myth Redrawn: Strong, Courageous Women" is available at the exhibit and on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).



"Brave Chicago Girls." In Joan Hickey's world, ordinary women are heroic.