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Submitted Photo

Local arts legend Ann Roberts' Long Drift Home, one of the works that will be displayed as part of a retrospective at the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery starting Jan. 29.

Local art legend Ann Roberts says Clay and Glass retrospective inspires her

By Bob Vrbanac, Chronicle Staff

It might be a retrospective featuring the works of local arts legend Ann Roberts at the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery honouring her 50-year career but it's also a new beginning.

Ann Roberts: With Both Fear and Intrepid Enthusiasm is an exhibition showing the 75-year-old hasn't given up her muse. It has actually inspired Roberts to unveil her latest work, tentatively titled Last Voyage, when the show is officially launched Jan. 29 with an artist's talk at Knox Presbyterian.



What Roberts has done for the local arts community is no small feat as she was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the local gallery, while a professor emeritus of fine arts at the University of Waterloo.

"She spearheaded the development of this gallery," said Christian Bernard Singer, curator of the CCGG. "She's really important to the history of this gallery, and celebrating ceramic and glass artists nationally and internationally."

She was also the first artist commissioned by the City of Waterloo to create a work of public art called Triad: Dual, Interface and Reunited that still draws curious looks in front of the parkade on King Street. The bronze statue has many layered meanings, making Roberts laugh with their suggested anatomical references. But there is also some deeper, layered meaning within it.

And meaning is something Roberts said she still finds in her works. The retrospective has allowed her to connect with some long lost pieces and rediscover some of their themes and imagery.

"The part I'm enjoying is work that I haven't seen for a while and see the progression of how the work changed over the years," said Roberts. "I begin to see how I want to return to some of the themes that I used earlier and then moved on to something else."

Her latest work, for instance, features the old steamer truck her grandfather gave to her mother as she left her native England for adventure in Africa.

It turned up in Roberts' childhood room covered with a leopard skin her grandfather bagged after it preyed on a local village. It became part of her family's folklore.

She still has the trunk, and decided to paint on spots and added ceramic touches to symbolize the journey it's been through, including Roberts' own move from her native Zambia in 1960.

"We packed our worldly goods in it and shipped it to Canada," said Roberts, who will share some of her inspiration with what is expected to be a big audience this Sunday. "I think I'll probably call it Last Voyage although I don't know where it's going after this."

In the past few years Roberts has served as a mentor to other artists and is delighted some of their works will be on

display at the show. "They've served to inspire me as well," she said.

Roberts said she's even surprised by some of her older works and hopes people join with her in rediscovering them.

"I hope that other people see the humor in some of them while being challenged by other pieces," she said.