

'Race, Class, Gender' expands horizons

By NANCYE TUTTLE
Sun Staff

LOWELL — Jerry Beck is like a kid in a candy shop as he takes a visitor through *Race, Class, Gender (does not equal) Character*, the groundbreaking exhibit that opens Saturday at the Revolving Museum.

The exhibit, from the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, is a first-time collaboration to promote art by those who aren't usually invited to exhibit at most mainstream galleries and museums.

"The museum caters to self-taught visionary artists — people who never went to art school but are driven to follow their vision and make work that is so honest. In art school, you're driven by how you'll make a living and find your 15 minutes of fame. These artists have a whole new vision," said Beck.

Beck is a close friend and ally of AVAM's founding director, Rebecca Hoffberger, who established her museum 11 years ago this month. Dubbed one of the "top 4 or 5 attractions in the U.S." by *U.S. Travel Holiday Magazine*, the Baltimore Inner Harbor facility is a larger version of Beck's Revolving Museum.

"She and I are kindred spirits. She's one of the most inspiring people I've ever met. She called and asked if we'd like to show the exhibit here



"Harriet Tubman,"
by Leon Kennedy

and I was thrilled," said Beck.

Due to space limitations, only part of what was shown in Baltimore is on view in Lowell. But the art is dramatic, thought-provoking and breaks down gender, race and class barriers.

Not to be missed are Chris Roberts-Antieu's dramatic confessional collage, "Bad Habits Die Hard"; Mr. Imagination's dazzling "Throne and Ottoman"; Linda St. John's "Skinny Girls," 196 dressed figures made of pipe cleaners; and fabric tapestries by African women commenting on violence and the treatment of women in their culture.

"It's just so honest and that comes out," said Beck.

In addition, there are works by local artists Pam Goncalves, Jose Gonzalez,

Sanford Winslow, Tony Cruz and student artists from UTEC and ArtBotics (local educational groups affiliated with the Revolving Museum).

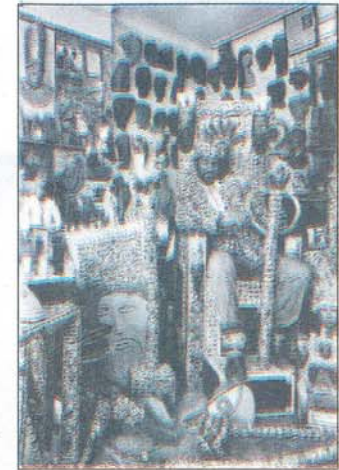
"Bringing internationally renowned visionary artists and mixing them with our local artists and youth is important for our community and commitment to education," said Beck.

This is the first time Hoffberger has moved an exhibit — and it was natural to partner with Beck, she said.

"Jerry is my foremost partner. He blows on the embers of people's soul. I have a great

deal of respect for all he does on a limited basis. He's a miracle worker," said Hoffberger.

An opening reception will be held Saturday from 7-10 p.m. Hoffberger and state Sen. Steve Panagiotakis will be there. Entertainment will be provided by Craig Robertson, Mark Occhionero and Melvern Taylor and the Fabulous Meltones in the Ukulele Cabaret. The exhibit runs through Feb. 4 at the Revolving Museum, 22 Shattuck St., Lowell. Open Tuesday-Sunday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Admission free. Call 978-937-2787.



Mr. Imagination,
Portrait with Throne and
Staff, photo by Ron Gordon

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