

off the lip

Naughty & nice

JILLIAN BARBER, 63

Clay Sculptor

Ever wonder what's hidden under Santa's big, red pantsuit? Many might not care to imagine. But every year, Jamestown artist Jillian Barber taps into her slightly naughty side to mold Der Nuden Kringles, a variety of skinny ceramic Santa ornaments that reveal jolly old St. Nick's special package — yes, his twig and holly berries. And like ancient Greek and Roman sculptures that flaunt exaggerated phalluses, Barber makes wispy angel ornaments that boast incredibly long and winding genitalia. Less revealing ornaments by the British-born/Westerly-bred artist include dogs, mermaids, green men (faces with leaves) and peapods. Although the mild-mannered Barber has been hand-molding her humorous tree adornments since the '70s, the award-winning, veteran sculptor is best known for her serious works — fantasy masks, mythical animals, colorful sea creatures and ethereal mermaids. Last February, the RISD alumna won first place in sculpture at the Newport Art Museum's member's show for her large, ancient feline clay sculpture, "Katmandu." Visit www.jillianbarber.com. **BY JENNIFER NICOLE SULLIVAN**

Why did you begin making nude Christmas ornaments?

There was a female artist in Providence. She did these strange, knuckly little guys with enormous penises. They were so weird looking, I thought, "I love those! I want to make one." What I made were much more delicate, whimsical and feminine looking. Sometimes you see something and it gives you permission to go there. To that place where few are likely to go.

Had you created nude art before?

When you go to art school, you get used to nudity. I spent several summers getting an all-over tan. I'm not shy that way. At shows, people will say, "Oh no, I couldn't have that in my house. My grandchildren will be upset." And I say, "Your grandchildren would love it. They don't have any thoughts one way or another about that."

What ornaments have you made through the years?

Every year I would try to think of a new ornament. There were Christmas angels, male and female. There were the Christmas devils with bat wings and horns. Of course, they were more endowed than the angels. There were mermaids and mermen. For many years I made Madonna with child. Then they got sillier and more irreverent. I made black snowmen; I made white snowmen. I make little ones that stand up. I mean, the penises are like one-thirty-second of an inch long. Nobody even notices. Finally I thought, whom haven't I disrobed? Oh. Santa.

What are some of your Santa ornaments holding?

I have them holding bottles of alcohol that range from Dom Perignon to Bud or Ripple. One guy had me put a bottle of Viagra. One year I sent a Santa ornament to Buddy Cianci and it held "Bud-

dy's Special Sauce" because he makes his own marinara sauce. He sent me a long letter. He thanked me and told me all about his skating rink. But then I met him at a show in Providence. I said, "Hi, I'm the one who sent you the Santa Claus." He said, "Oh you wild woman, you!" He was very sweet.

Have you given your ornaments to anyone else?

One year, I got a letter during the Clinton Administration. A big white envelope said in gold, "The White House." It was an invitation to send an ornament to the White House. The theme that year was angels, which was perfect for me. I sent them the Madonnas. Little naked ladies holding babies. I got a lovely thank you from Hillary and Bill.

What reaction did you get when you began selling your ornaments?

Because I was a little shy about showing them around here, getting a bad reputation, I would send the wackiest ones to San Diego — the Navy is out there. They love them. The ornaments all have some attitude and they're very irreverent. It's like, you take something that might raise an eyebrow to some people, but if you push it to an extreme, all you can do is laugh. It goes into another realm that has nothing to do with sex at all. It's just plain funny.

Some of the Santas hold sheet music with funny sayings. How do you come up with those one-liners?

I actually went through a songbook and picked out lines from Christmas carols that are double entendres you can take two ways like, "He sees you when you're sleeping." Oh really? If you think about it, it's kind of weird. Is Santa a voyeur? Like, "Gonna find out if you're naughty or nice," and one of my favorites, "Oh what fun it is to ride..." One man picked one out that said, "Oh



The shape of things.

Jillian Barber, shown in her Jamestown studio, has made a name for herself creating fantasy masks and whimsical holiday ornaments that expose Santa's secret. PHOTO BY JACQUELINE MARQUE

come all ye faithful" and he said, "I'm going to give this to my priest." I said, "Seriously?" The next year, he bought more and said, "He loved it! He got a big kick out of it." But a lot of people (buy), "I can't give you anything but love" and that to me sums up the whole Christmas spirit. That's what Santa has in his sleigh, just love ultimately.

Any recent additions to the ornaments?

This year, some of the Santas' sheet music will say, "Santa's Stimulus Package." During the Clinton Administration, they read, "The Starr Report." I thought that would excite Santa. Reading the Starr Report to find out what Clinton was doing in the Oval Office.

On some of the Santas, you can only see his berries. Where is his twig?

This is what I was a little worried about putting it in the paper. Because actually, he has this little erection which is only visible if you look on the other side of the sheet music. All you see is this little pink thing. (Laughing.) It's hysterical.

You really have to look close to even see Santa's berries...

You don't notice right away. It's meant

to be as subtle as subtle can be. Some Santas are holding a big holly leaf, like Adam holding a fig leaf. There's nothing going on down there.

How do you hand sculpt each one?

One at a time. They're all made out of coils. I press the face, then a little tiny piece of clay with lines drawn in it for hair. Then the penis. You roll out this tiny little piece of clay, squeeze another little piece of clay and put it on the top. And honestly, it makes an instant little wanker.

Have you ever thought about making a Mrs. Claus to go with Santa?

That's really funny; that never occurred to me. She doesn't exist in my world, I don't think. Little old lady ... noooooo ...

e Ornaments available at: *RISD Holiday Art Sale, Sat., 12-12, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Rhode Island Convention Center, 1 Sabin St., Providence. (401) 454-6618. \$7; free for children under 14 & current RISD students. Also at Jamestown Designs in Jamestown, Sun-Up Gallery in Westerly, ArtWorks! in New Bedford, Mass., and DeBlois Gallery in Newport.*