

# Exhibit reveals artist as superb storyteller

By Grayce Scholt  
Contributing writer

Artist, poet, moralist — all of these words describe Minneapolis artist Susan Hensel.

But above all, "Assembling Memory," an exhibit of her work at Mott Community College's Fine Arts Gallery, reveals her as a thought-provoking storyteller.

Each of the 32 "narrative sculpture" objects in the exhibit is "an exploration of a story I need to tell," she said. They are a combination of words, sights and emotions that invite the viewer to participate, even to handle the found and invented items.

Some are based on childhood memories, such as

"My House," a construction made of "pages" of a book showing rooms in a house on which poetic accounts of memories are printed in a "broken typewriter" font.

Another is "Easter Box," a nostalgic gathering of items recalling the 1950s. The black hat box contains women's hats of the period, each inscribed with "wonderings," and white and black gloves with bits of poems printed on their palms. A tiny sachet is included, which invites the viewer to smell it.

Another story-memory, "The Cosmology of Constraint," is revealed in a body cast the artist had to wear as the result of an accident. The cast is a metaphor for the choices we are forced to make —

between restraint or freedom. Two "Literary Sculptures" are "Sylvia" and "A Reliquary for D.H." The first is an elegy to the writer Sylvia Plath, whose book, "The Bell Jar," is the focal point of the box. Embedded in the book is a tiny glass jar. The box also contains ashes, burnt fragments of her poems, roses, and thorns.

The second is a reliquary for the novelist D.H. Lawrence, whose tempestuous life and conflicted sexuality are suggested by a portion of



▲ "Easter Box," by Susan Hensel, is a nostalgic gathering of holiday items.

a man's coat sleeve on one side of the piece and a woman's blouse on the other. When pulled aside, each reveals bosoms, one male, one female. "Retablo for Kate" is a related piece about Lawrence and the Mexican Revolution. It is made of putty board, paint and hundreds of prayer symbols.

A strong religious emotion is evident throughout the exhibit. "Resurrection" is a replica of a mausoleum with the door cast aside. "The Gift," the story of the Annunciation — the announcement to Mary

## Review

### "Assembling Memory"

- **WHERE:** Mott Community College Fine Arts Gallery, Visual Arts and Design Center, 1401 E. Court St.
- **WHEN:** Through April 19
- **HOURS:** 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekdays
- **DETAILS:** (810) 762-0443

that she would give birth to Jesus, is seen through a contemporary parent's eyes. "From the Soul" is a large human torso made up of several painted layers, from skin, to muscle, to rib cage, to a three-dimensional illuminated heart. The text reads, "Let light shine out of darkness ..."

The "War Chest" series is made of up several powerful pieces, each extolling the conflicting idea of "just wars." "The Peacemaker," the pistol that claimed to bring peace to the American Wild West, is juxtaposed with the claim that the threat of atomic weapons will bring the end of wars. "Patton's Hand" is an assemblage, crammed into a wooden cigar box, of found objects and photo collages of soldiers alive and dead. A bony hand is superimposed on each page. The last item in the box is a three-dimensional skeleton's hand.