

by Colleen Dougher
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To view the interactive mixed-media sculptures in **Jean Minuchin's** *Mask and Mirrors* series, is to participate in a story. Three imaginative works, currently on exhibit at the **Projects Exhibition Space** in Fort Lauderdale's **F.A.T. Village**, are about the size of a photo booth, one smaller and surrounded in part by a curtain. A figure with a face and eyeholes appears on an exterior wall of each booth. A pair of headphones hang above each face. Put them on and look through the eyeholes and you'll hear a story by Minuchin. Rods placed outside the booth allow you to move the figures' arms. In one piece, you can see your own eyes reflected back at you from the character's face.

A gander inside "Mask and Mirrors #1" finds a sculpted woman in a dark dress in what appears to be a mirror at the end of a hallway. The curtain that hangs on either side resembles old-fashioned wallpaper. "She knew what was at stake," you'll hear through the headphones, "and though she was paralyzed in place, she flew through the window in her mind."

These works are the culmination of Minuchin's many talents. The artist, who owns the F.A.T. Village gallery **World and Eye**, is a sculptor, puppeteer, performance artist and playwright. But sculpting was her first love.

“I started as a sculptor many years ago, and my sculptures always had stories and characters in them,” she says. “At some point, I started to want to wear them.”



So Minuchin began making masks and wearable body puppets and writing stories that brought them to life in her performances. Her recent installations demonstrate that she's found another way to draw people into her stories and by doing so, make them characters in them. Many of the artist's works address themes of inclusion and exclusion.

She says the theater piece *Beneath the Hood* concerns “the way people include and exclude people. It's a 45-minute solo performance in which I move in and out of different masked characters who are outcasts in one way or another.” Among them is Mabel, a “faded beauty who is struggling with the loss of her youth and [is] a little neurotic,” Minuchin says. “Everything needs to be clean. She's very afraid of mess and all the things related to messes.” When Mabel discusses “the bird of her youth,” she turns into a bird and is seen as “a young character in all of her finery.” She then turns back into an older woman.



Minuchin, who performed the piece last year at **Andrews Living Artists Studio**, has another theater project in the works. *Odyssey in the Land of Shadows* is about the stages of grief. “Eventually, what I want to do with the theater stuff is create a small theater group and go out into the community,” she says, “to hospitals, schools and elder housing communities — with works that are connected to particular problems and might be relevant.”

Minuchin sometimes pairs her performances with creativity-based workshops. In September, she will hold a class in her World and Eye gallery on how to pair performance and workshops to create social change. She opened World and Eye in F.A.T. Village eight months ago. The arts district, which is also home to a theater space (Andrews Living Arts Studio) and another puppeteer (**Jim Hammond**), seems a perfect fit for Minuchin. “This community is open and it’s growing and it’s excited about new things and new people,” she says.



This fall, she and Hammond will produce and curate a series of puppet slams at World and Eye during the Oct. 29 Day of the Dead festival in F.A.T. Village, and another on Nov. 5 at the Arts Garage in Delray Beach. The latter is described in the event invitation as “a late-night drunken blitzkrieg of hell-bent bunnies and cuddly chain saws.” It may include classic sideshow personas, a found object theater and puppet-cabaret acts.

Minuchin’s mixed-media sculptures will be on view through the next **F.A.T. Village Art Walk**, which will take place from 7 to 11 p.m. Saturday at the Artists of F.A.T. Village in the Projects Exhibition Space, 519 N.W. First Ave., in Fort Lauderdale. Her work also will be on display that night at *Visual Histories and Remembrance*, an exhibition at World and Eye, 109 N.W. 5th St., also in Fort Lauderdale. Call 954-540-9897 or visit Worldandeye.com.

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