

## AROUND CONNECTICUT

### THE CREATIVE LIFE

# A Woman With a Rich History, Making Art and Teaching Children

By MARGO NASH

GOSHEN

**D**ANIELLE MAILER'S secrets are closely held. She weaves them into her art, into the mysterious long-limbed women she cuts out of Masonite and paints with acrylics. Black birds, trombones and skulls hide in their hair and bodies. The women crouch on walls or tumble in space, clad in leopard skin, beads, brilliant polka dots and stripes. Artichokes in their hearts, their faces never quite revealed, they live in two-dimensional silhouettes that resemble their dark-haired, long-limbed creator.

Ms. Mailer, who lives in Goshen, is the daughter of Norman Mailer and the abstract artist Adele Morales Mailer. Her life has also been lived in silhouette, or “low profile,” as she prefers to call it.

“I’ve kept a low profile because there’s always that sense that you want to make it on your own,” said Ms. Mailer, 49, who has a full-time job in Lakeville as chairwoman of the art department at the Indian Mountain School, a private school for prekindergarten through the ninth grade.

“I’ve just been quietly doing my thing,” she said.

But her “thing” has been gaining attention. Ms. Mailer’s paintings and sculptures are on view through April 6 in “Dreaming in Color,” an exhibit at Teachers College at Columbia University (212-678-3494) and, from April 17 to May 26, at the Cornwall Library



Thomas McDonald for The New York Times

**BODIES OF WORK** Danielle Mailer with several of her creations at her studio.

(860-672-6874). A larger display of her work can be seen at the Danielle Mailer Gallery, a former mill in Goshen that is Ms. Mailer’s studio (860-480-1392, by appointment). And in November, she will have a one-woman show at Umbrella Arts in Manhattan.

“There is a body of work,” she said.

And it usually involves women’s bodies, intertwined with objects from Ms. Mailer’s

life. The trombones in the paintings come from the fact that her husband, Peter McEachern, is a jazz trombonist. The chili peppers that appear in some works are from her Peruvian grandmother. And the artichokes are explained, in part, by the relaxing times Ms. Mailer and her mother shared consuming them.

Her mother still has one of the first draw-

ings her daughter made as a child. “She did an imitation of one of her father’s parties — figures holding cocktail glasses, very fanciful, strange faces that she caught, blasé people,” said Adele Mailer, who described that period in her 1997 book, “The Last Party.”

Adele and Norman Mailer split up in 1960 after a highly publicized event in which Mr. Mailer stabbed her at that last party with a penknife. She was the second of Mr. Mailer’s six wives. In all, Danielle Mailer has eight brothers and sisters, including Elizabeth Mailer, who is also the daughter of Adele and Norman Mailer.

Despite the many changes in her childhood, Ms. Mailer said, there was also stability. “It didn’t matter who he was married to or what women were on the scene at my father’s,” she said. “No matter what was going on in the media, no matter what kind of crisis, we had lunch at my grandmother Fanny’s every Sunday without fail.

“She lived around the corner from my father in Brooklyn Heights. We spent Fridays and Saturdays with my dad, and it was just an amazing constant in my childhood. It gave me a sense of safety. Within that, there was chaos and drama and colorful characters who weaved in and out of our childhood. But we could rely on our father, who would never disappear.”

Her father took her to museums and bought her art books. (“At the time, I would probably have preferred a Barbie doll,” Ms. Mailer confesses.) At home in Greenwich

Village, where her mother’s oil paints were everywhere, she learned there was little separation between art and life. And from her father, she said, she learned discipline. “At eight or nine o’ clock in the morning, he would go up to his studio — usually in the various places we lived there was always a climb — and he still does that, and that was very inspiring.”

In an e-mail message, Mr. Mailer wrote: “Danielle and I have always been close. I think part of this is her taste, her talent and the bravura of her art.”

Ms. Mailer graduated from Bowdoin College in 1979 with a B.A. in art, and went on to study at the New York Studio School and the School of Visual Arts in New York City. She later worked as a graphic artist and, from 1982 to 1986, was an associate art director for ARTnews magazine in New York.

It was not until she started teaching, Ms. Mailer said, that she managed to break away from the academic styles she had been taught. When she gave her students permission to experiment, she gave herself permission, too.

Instead of using the traditional rectangle of canvas, she makes women’s bodies the canvas, she says, so that she can show them as “vital sexual creatures, their timeless ageless, persona.”

Sometimes she even uses herself as the model. But she does not like to dwell on that, because Danielle Mailer likes to keep a low profile.