Buffalo offers artists many formats to express their observations and concerns - and Cornelia Dohse-Peck has taken advantage of them. The seamless connection between her intellectual concerns and her artistic talents have resulted in pieces shared in more than 100 settings. She has incorporated found objects and other mixed media into her exploration of topics of social significance, including environmental concerns. Her upcoming solo show at the Levy and Daniel Families Art Gallery at the JCC Holland Family Building, 787 Delaware, Buffalo, will include pieces illustrating her range. She has chosen to take advantage of the dynamic, curved space to address fears about the extinction of whales, and the pollution of water within which they reside. Using the space to mount a piece measuring 56 inches by 182 inches, she will incorporate found and purchased objects, paint, quotations and drawings into this focal piece, a whale. The whale emerged from several years of work on art projects (a “man versus nature” series) focusing on plastics, which gradually progressed into an exploration of water-related issues. Her on-going concerns about environmental crises led naturally to the centerpiece of this show.

Over her twenty-five years in Buffalo, Dohse-Peck has served as a teaching artist and artist-in-residence in multiple settings. Schools, institutes, and museums have invited her to enable students to find their own artistic voices, using whatever materials best enable them to express their thoughts and feelings. Because of the diversity of her work, her ways of approaching intellectual investigations have varied.

For a recent public art project, in 2016-2017, with the City of Buffalo, she incorporated symbols, animal silhouettes, stones and other materials into integrated mosaics on eight benches (and on the ground) as part of the Buffalo Riverwalk Shoreline Trail Improvements Project, Peace Walk Discovery Trail. This initiative required her to integrate her vision of meaningful messages for those on the trail with the practical aspects of site-specific installations. A review of this work was featured in Buffalo Rising https://www.buffaloring.com/2019/05/the-peace-walk-discovery-trail-echoes-the-
She uses her art to explore thought-provoking topics such as social criticism, racial disparities, and political happenings, as well as to create more personal pieces. Major local institutions (the Castellani Gallery, El Museo, the Albright Knox Art Gallery, the Kenan Center, to name just a few) have included her work in exhibitions. She has also had 12 solo shows at, among others, the Carnegie Art Center, North Tonawanda; Virginia Weiss Gallery at Empire State College, Buffalo; Olean Public Gallery, Olean; CEPA Gallery Underground, Buffalo; Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland, OH. This will be her first solo show at the JCC.

Because of the direct connection between Dohse-Peck’s concerns, the focal piece of the JCC show, and the mission of Buffalo-Niagara Waterkeepers, the organization has partnered with her and the JCC for this show. The exhibit will open with a reception on Sunday, March 8 from 2:00 -4:00 pm. A closing reception will take place on Wednesday, April 29 beginning 6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. at which community members will be invited to bid on the individual canvases that make up the whale; a portion of the proceeds will be donated to the Buffalo Niagara Waterkeepers. For the past 30 years, Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper (http://www.bnwaterkeeper.org/) has been the guardian of Western New York’s fresh water. Their mission is four-fold: to PROTECT the water, RESTORE both the waterways and the surrounding ecosystems, CONNECT people to their waterways, and INSPIRE both economic activity along the waterways and community engagement.

At the closing reception on April 29, a short presentation will be given by a staff member of BNW, regarding concerns which Dohse-Peck shares: “Plastic items, specifically single-use items, are the most common items collected by volunteers at BNW cleanups. This plastic pollution negatively impacts our local waterways and wildlife. Creating awareness of the issue is the first step toward creating a solution.” The presentation is happening because of the connection between BNW’s mission and is interest in highlighting works by local artists to inspire action to stop plastic pollution.

Dohse-Peck’s inspiration for the centerpiece of the JCC show came from her concerns about whales, and the environment. In speaking about the piece, Dohse-Peck shared its origins:

“I feel kinship with the whale as the largest mammal because his/her environment is being polluted/changed/destroyed (so is mine and all of ours because we all need healthy water). In creating this work, extinction of whales is not the primary focus. Rather, it’s the HELP needed by these mammals. Our waters are being transformed into dangerous garbage pools. As waters are destroyed, we will be destroyed with it - just like the whales and other creatures!!”

The show offers viewers opportunities to see not only the show’s centerpiece, but other works by her. When the whale is broken up at the end of the exhibition, Dohse-
Peck anticipates that “each of its pieces will be abstract reminders of the whale’s full and powerful presence.”

For more information about the artist, see www.ArtStudioDohsePeck.com

The Levy and Daniel Families Art Gallery at the JCC Holland Family Building, open during JCC business hours, 7 days a week, offers free admission. For more information, visit jccbuffalo.org or contact Katie Wzontek at 716-204-2084 or Kwzontek@jccbuffalo.org.