Pulse of the Twin Cities

The Wood & I: Images by Heidi Henderson

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*by **Valerie Valentine***

Thanks to Christmas merchandisers, reds and greens are erupting everywhere. Artist Heidi Henderson has reclaimed these colors, saving them from commercialization and injecting vibrancy and new meaning into traditional holiday hues. Her subject and medium blend seamlessly in her recent series, *The Wood and I*.

Her show at Bloomington Art Center's Atrium Gallery reveals a deep connection to the natural world. Using found wood doors as surface, Henderson portrays a fantastical wilderness. She celebrates the earth with vitality, even as our gardens prepare to sleep.

Heidi Henderson's "A Slice of Life" at Bloomington Art Center.

In nature's time of hibernation and death, Henderson induces the inevitable fecundity of spring. Mysterious, shrouded females dance with flower-faced men in a joyful, ritualistic fertility dance. Ribbons are woven into the paintings, and toucans pluck at ripe fruit. The rich color honors Frida Kahlo's sunny shades.

Tropical plant life leaps off the wood surfaces. Textural swirls of acrylic and oil paint creates kinetic loops and twists. The psychedelic movements of Henderson's gestures animate flowerbeds, bringing them to life. Sprouts are surrounded by sprightly figures, plucked from the artist's dreams and imagination.

Henderson addresses a challenge that becomes her successful premise: working with the grain and texture of wood. Though the doors are often smooth surfaces, decorative cutouts of the wood create negative spaces and recesses. Paint smeared against the grain lightly feathers its consistency, resulting in an ethereal subtlety.

"A Slice of Life" is an interesting study in materials. Several panels—a jigsaw of wooden blocks—are painstakingly hinged together, with pulsating flowers, weird insects and butterflies popping out of their centers. The train of images flows like thoughts in the stream of consciousness.

In another work, a tree sculpture doubles as an easel for rotating painted blocks. The effect of the slow movement mimics leaves swaying in the wind. The ever-changing visuals allude to the growth and change of a tree's fruit and foliage through the seasons. The dry, bare

wood is the tree's skeleton: a framework for what once thrived. Henderson nods to the recyclable character of this versatile natural resource. In executing her creative vision, the artist effectively communicates an intimate relationship with trees.

Bloomington Art Center is a valuable community resource. It's open late, and offers studios, two exhibition galleries, a performing arts center and art classes. ||

Heidi Henderson's exhibit runs through Dec. 31. Bloomington Art Center is located at 1800 W. Old Shakopee Rd. They are open Mon.–Fri. 8 a.m.–10 p.m.; Sat. 9 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sun. 1–10 p.m.

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