



Supplemental Ornament

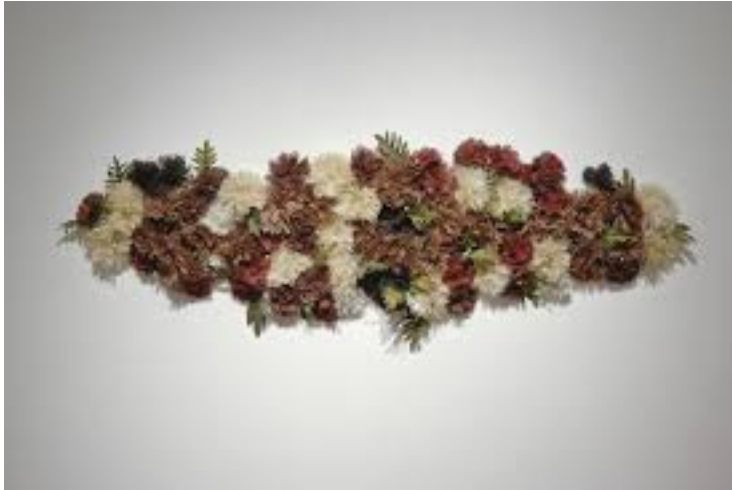
Althea Murphy-Price makes sculpture from hairdos

MATT MORRIS // DEC 3, 2008

Althea Murphy-Price is fascinated by the everyday fashion show of our lives, where we all walk around projecting and revealing information about ourselves through the hairstyles we sport, what we wear and all the superficial details that make up our self-images.

In her new exhibition, *Supplemental Ornament*, at the Weston Art Gallery in downtown's Aronoff Center for the Arts, Murphy-Price presents sculptures and prints

that simultaneously focus and exaggerate the relationship between our internal identities and the selected accouterments that extend our personalities into an array of surrounding decorative objects. All the work on display has been made since she earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Tyler School of Art at Temple University in 2005. She now resides in Bloomington, Ind. The Weston is also currently displaying sculpture by Dietrich Wagner of Erie, Pa., and *Pixel* paintings by Cincinnati's Jimi Jones, through Jan. 10.



Most of Murphy-Price's exhibition is made from synthetic hair. Even the delicate framed lithographs that accompany the sculptures repeat a texture of hair clippings that Murphy-Price uses in installations. "All That Remains: Rug Series" features, for instance, blonde, brown, auburn and other dark hair clippings that seem to have been stenciled into

the patterns of an elaborately ornamental rug on a low dais.

Over the past several years, the artist has pushed her use of synthetic hair to the very brink of its possibilities: braiding it, clipping it into a fine powder and innovatively fusing it into sheets and ribbons that can be cut into shapes or folded into bows.

Murphy-Price has found totally unorthodox methods to transform a material traditionally used for hair extensions and weave — a plastic thread similar to fishing line. Her sculptures are dramatic makeovers, reinventing the material the same way a salon might make you into a whole new person simply by giving you an edgy new hair style. And while all of the works are totally likable, my sense is that viewers will reveal something of themselves when they gravitate to one style of work over another.

My preference leans toward pieces that reference and reinvent the traditions of Victorian hair jewelry, where clippings of loved ones' hair were integrated into brooches, wreaths and lockets. The piece "Arrangement" includes silk leaves to make the various brown blossoms of hair read more clearly as a floral spray, as if for a funeral or memorial. The colors of hair we think of as "natural" here become a nostalgic sepia portrait, a remembrance. Just to its right is

“Long Attachment,” a strikingly different arrangement in all-white hair that has been styled into bows and ribbons cascading down to the floor in chilly purity.

In sculptures like “Sunday Crown” and “Mamma Pearl,” the artist creates topiary-like objects that reminisce over the parades of elaborate hats worn by an older generation to attend Sunday morning church services or to recall the grand showcase of millinery at the Kentucky Derby and other horse races. From the Queen of England on down, hats and hairdos have always conveyed remarks, statements and semiotics about the wearers.

Throughout the exhibition, Murphy- Price sets up the viewer so that you learn something about personal taste and what a difference styling and decoration can make in our final perceptions and judgments. Take that meaning a step further and it is clear that while this work waxes fantastic in a diversity of self-expression, the range of objects proves that our identities, as we present them to one another, are constructed — often deceptive and only to be relied on to an extent.

SUPPLEMENTAL ORNAMENT is on view at the Weston Art Gallery through Jan. 10, 2009.

<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13018392/supplemental-ornament-review>