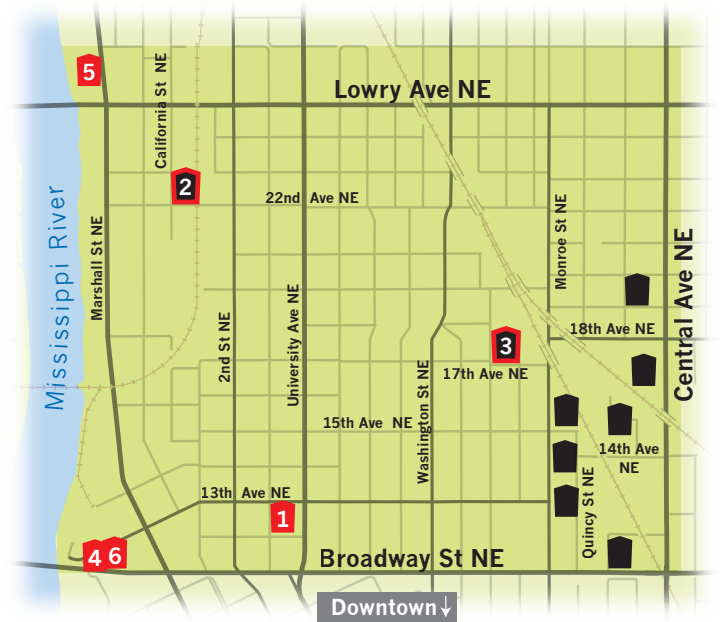


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A page about artists and The Arts at Work by the Northeast Minneapolis Arts District in collaboration with the Northeast.



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Karen Gustafson: Botany as metaphor for diversity

Karen Gustafson’s machine-embroidered drawings of plants inspired by a 2,000+ year old botanical textbook are more than they appear. The translucence of the organza fabric allows the shadow of the images to become part of the display. Twenty-five of them appeared in an exhibit at the Landscape Arboretum focused on common edibles, called “Foraging for Sustenance.”

She’s chosen some of the plants to stitch for their healing properties. Gustafson noted how subsequent versions and translations of the original textbook changed the way the images were categorized, reflecting societal changes over the centuries.

“At one point after the “Foraging for Sustenance” exhibit I thought of stopping, and then realized it was important especially now, to keep going. The project is about the importance of diversity in healthy eco systems” and all systems.

Gustafson does not want to sell any of the finished work now (“I do want to realize my larger vision, an exhibit where the viewer is surrounded by the plants.”) but is taking names and numbers. She continues to exhibit the work while working towards that goal. Three of her pieces are currently in the exhibit, “The Art of Labor” at the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles in California.

To represent the entire book, at the rate she can sew (about one



image a week, given that she is teaching full-time) it would take about six or seven years. She’s two years in and chooses subjects “for their animated qualities,” those plants that have the appearance of movement in the placement of their leaves and root systems.

Woolly Blackberry, photo credit Petronella Ytsma. Karen Gustafson, photo by Margo Ashmore.

State Fair Preview

Several Northeast artists report they’ve passed the first hurdle and were asked to bring their art for in-person jurying at the fairgrounds.

If the entire state fair experience is not your thing, you can see the diversity of fine art submissions from all over the state at a quieter, easier to access, preview night Tuesday, Aug. 21.

Tickets, \$40, for the First Glance, by invitation event, 5-6:30 pm are available for purchase at msfoundation.org or by calling 651-288-4323.

There’s also a free event Aug. 21 for the general public, 7-9:30 p.m. in the Fine Arts Center.

For further information, call 651-288-4417.

Northeast Calendar

Jurying for the Northeast Community Development Corporation’s Northeast Calendar was underway as this edition went to press. Twenty-six artists submitted more than 120 images, and 11 applied to be commissioned to illustrate the 14 neighborhoods in Northeast Minneapolis. The free calendars will be available in early November.

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Artists are speaking up for environment, bio-diversity

by Margo Ashmore
“I remember hearing stories of when the Mississippi was on fire,” Linda Snouffer said. In the 1960s there were chemicals on the surface, “and all that water went south” to small towns that drew their drinking supply from the river.

Snouffer and Deborah Foutch, both artists in the Northeast Minneapolis Arts District, will be part of a show at the Red Wing Art Center that illuminates the science of healthy water, soil and plant systems. It’s sponsored by the Pepin Legacy Alliance which is concerned that Lake Pepin is disappearing as silt washes in from poorly managed land.

We talked recently about their work and the voice that artists are giving to environmental concerns.

Snouffer, working with the Nature Conservancy which has let her pick fresh grasses for print-making, said only a small percentage of the species diversity will be able to be replicated in the land that they’re turning back to natural.

“Awareness is the place to take it,” Foutch said, “and that’s where artists have to step up, and do it in a way that’s not dry. Then the subject is awake.”

They both expressed that “politics have demanded that we speak up. It had to go to the extreme, to get people [off their butts]. Artists challenge many things. It’s one of the tools available.”

I wondered if all artists make political and environmental statements? Are artists activists in other ways?

Snouffer said she gets about 60 emails a day, 57 of which are requests for action or money, because she is interested in so many causes.

Though Foutch has been a block club leader and is contemplating having a get-out-the-vote party at her house, she said the statements her art makes are how she’s involved. “There are the ‘meeting’ people and the ‘telling the story’ people.”

Foutch currently is working on two bodies of work.

One is about soil and water.

She is using layers of materials and a combination of fiber, painting, and printing techniques to express the living world we stand on. She described two reactions to this work as confirming the work is effectively telling a story. When one of the first soil horizon pieces was hung at the state fair fine arts show she witnessed a discussion by a viewer of “living soil” and the fact that it needs to be conserved and protected. The other incident was having a soil science teacher look at one of her rooted pieces and say “I could teach with that.”

“Art that starts a conversation that needs to happen, while showing beautiful and true systems, lets me carry on lessons from childhood. My father was a soil conservationist, he succeeded best with farmers when he engaged them with an entertaining story tied to facts. I get to carry that forward in my own way with my visual language.”

She has traveled and done shows, and had her work in far-flung galleries, finding that people from all over



Deborah Foutch and Linda Snouffer discuss Foutch’s work showing how Minneapolis was first prairie, then farmland, and now man-made forest. Below, “Soil Horizon” by Deborah Foutch.



“Alley Grass” by Linda Snouffer

relate to the Mississippi River. Learning to talk about her art work and listen to the response can deepen or change a story.

Her other current body of work about the building of the parks system in Minneapolis, “Nature in the City,” came from a conversation with a with someone who was related to one of the corps of people who achieved the park system. It led her to research the political struggle to accomplish our parks. Her work are fiber “views” from the parks of the city they inhabit. She hopes the work will start a conversation.

The two artists looked at their work as examples of how artists evolve. Snouffer said when they met a few years ago, she was “more into process and now more into content” once she mastered those processes. “What does this mean and what do I want it to mean?”

Foutch spent years as a dollmaker, traveling and selling that work at craft fairs. She describes that work as personal. In those years she was a mother of a young child running a business that traveled. There was a piece that depicted a mother among suitcases “taking a rest” and another pulling a canoe full of burdens, a message that perhaps some things should be let go. That was much more introspective than her current work. “Art becomes another language of expression,” says Foutch who currently mentors artists. “A little more than half of artists I’m working with are stepping out into the world to express things [like environmental or social conscience]. The others, it’s about what’s internal, or about shape and light. As skill level increases, you find your voice.”

Linda Snouffer’s work

“I hear the clock ticking” as the plants grow, Linda Snouffer said. Her techniques involve printing directly from fresh grasses. She has a home work studio, with exhibit space at the Northrup King Building in Northeast. During summer printing season her home work studio spills into several areas of her home. Botanical print making is seasonal and dependent on using fresh plant material.

“In winter, when fresh plants are not available, I look to other means of art making. I found pastels, and the skies opened up for me.” Literally and figuratively. Snouffer now uses pastels to build backgrounds on which she prints grasses; pastels are also used to embellish prints later.

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