Review of “Holiday Exhibit” by Carl Mellor

Shawn L. Halperin’s solo exhibit at the Edgewood Gallery reflects her passion for nature, her affection for creatures such as loons, owls, and chickadees, and for deer and rainbow trout.

The show also document the artist’s ability to work in various media: she’s a wood carver, painter and jewelry maker. And so, the current exhibition includes wood sculptures, oils on canvas, oils/collages, mixed-media pieces and other artworks.

For starters, there are wood sculptures depicting a loon, chickadee with tail feathers, owl, and other creatures. The pieces are made from cedar, spalted birch, and other materials.

The exhibition displays oils like “Owl 4,” emphasizing a wing and talons, and “4 Chickadees,” an imaginative piece. In the latter work, Halperin provides glimpses of four birds, showing how she operates with a variety of visual strategies.

Because this is a one-artist exhibit, viewers see an in-depth treatment of Halperin’s artworks. That includes “Owl with Orange,” with its distinctive colors, and “Green Lakes Tulip Flowers,” which depicts a scene at the state park.

In addition, her six-panel portrayal of a loon is one of the best pieces in the exhibition. She works with wood and oil on canvas, spreading the depiction over six panels.

And the show presents a variety of other pieces: a serving tray made from cedar wood, “Great Rainbow,” a hand-sewn work combining felt and stained birch bark; and oil, “The Outlet/Echo.” That painting is pretty and well designed; it moves a viewer’s eye from sky to ground and back.

Beyond that, her artist’s statement is very much relevant to Halperin’s body of work. She indicates that she doesn’t strip bark from living trees; that would damage them. Instead, she gathers bark from fallen trees.

Similarly, she uses wood from trees blown down by storms or that’s been sustainably harvested on land owned by her family.

Moreover, Halperin is concerned with preservation of loons and other creatures. She and other artists took part in a group exhibit at Paul Smith College which benefitted the Adirondack Center for Loon Conservation.

Finally, the Edgewood show isn’t a retrospective of Halperin’s work; it’s a sampling. Over the years, she’s created a large body of work and displayed her pieces at the Remington Art Museum, the Schweinfurth Memorial Art Center, and other venues.

Her one-woman show is billed as a “Holiday Exhibit.” On one hand, it has little to do with Christmas or traditional notions of holiday time. On the other, it does a fine job of celebrating nature and our relationship to the natural world. That theme, and Halperin’s artistic skills, both energize the exhibit and give it structure.

The exhibit, which closes on January 3, 2020, is well worth a visit to the Edgewood Gallery, 216 Tecumseh Rd. The gallery is open from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information, call 315-445-8111.

Carl Mellor covered visual arts for the Syracuse New Times from 1994 through June, 2019 when the paper closed. He continues to write about Syracuse-area exhibitions and artists.