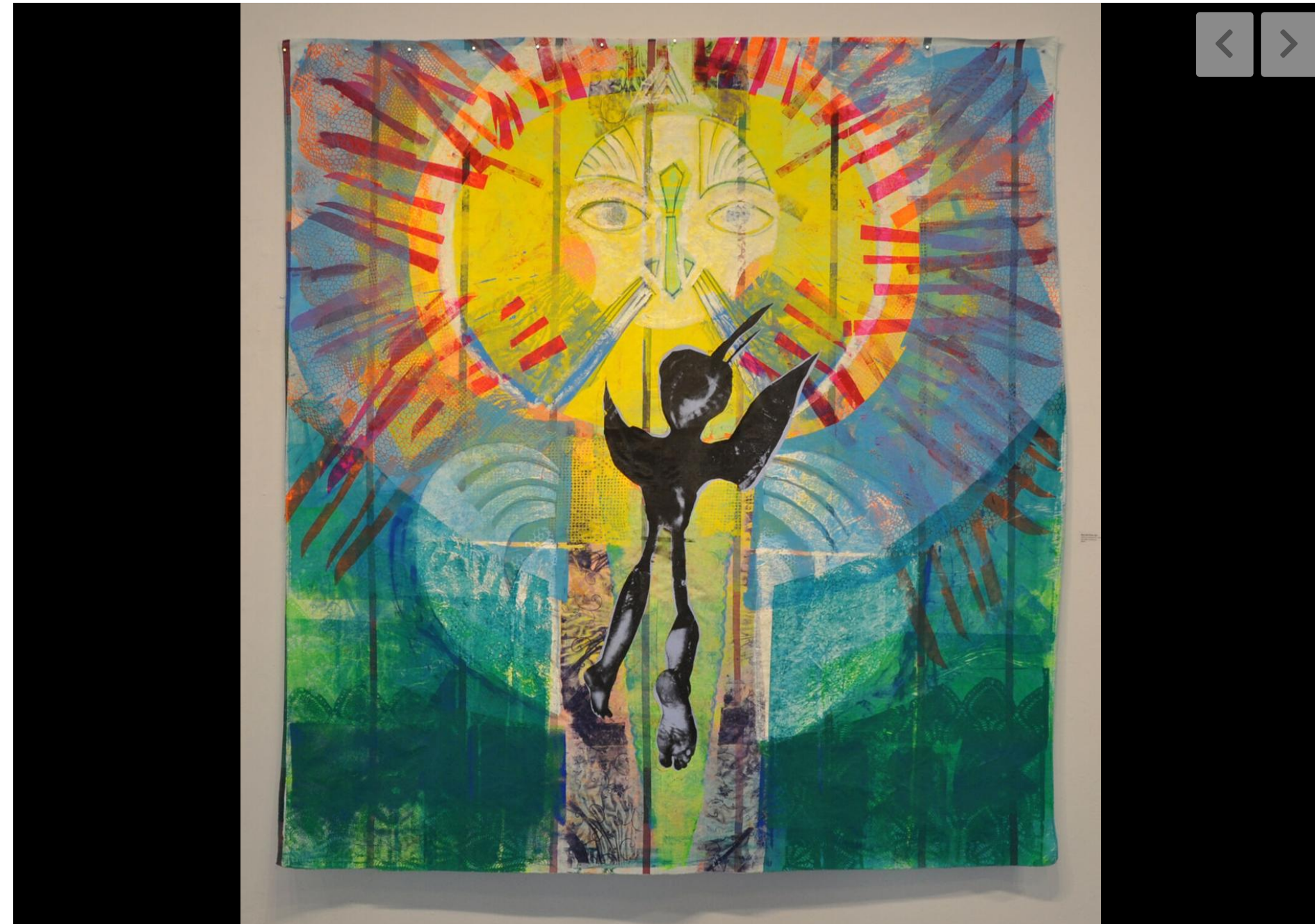


# Gnashing teeth and sharpened knives: Woodie Anderson's solo show at Artworks Gallery reveals an industrious, enterprising artist with a lot on her mind

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"Bird Girl Dries Out" is part of "Tooth and Nail: Fragments," a new exhibit by Woodie Anderson, at Artworks Gallery in downtown Winston-Salem.

Artworks Gallery, provided



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**I**ndustrious and enterprising are the first words that come to mind when seeing Woodie Anderson's solo exhibition at Artworks Gallery.

Anderson is a talented, resourceful artist whose specialty is printmaking, and her exhibition "Tooth and Nail: Fragments" leaves no doubt she's been busy. She's also clearly had a lot on her mind.

The show consists of 34 handmade prints, drawings and mixed-media works on surfaces ranging from conventional drawing paper to ripped-up pillow cases. In addition to these wall-mounted pieces, Anderson has set up an in-gallery booth where her original-print hand towels, handkerchiefs and note cards are on sale at affordable prices.

Anderson has established herself locally as a prolific artist with a wide thematic range. Some of her work is whimsical and decorative, as evidenced by many of the items in the booth, but she doesn't shy away from big themes. The show is "about the fight for love and community, as well as the human struggles of identity, self-protection and self-projection," according to her statement posted in the gallery.

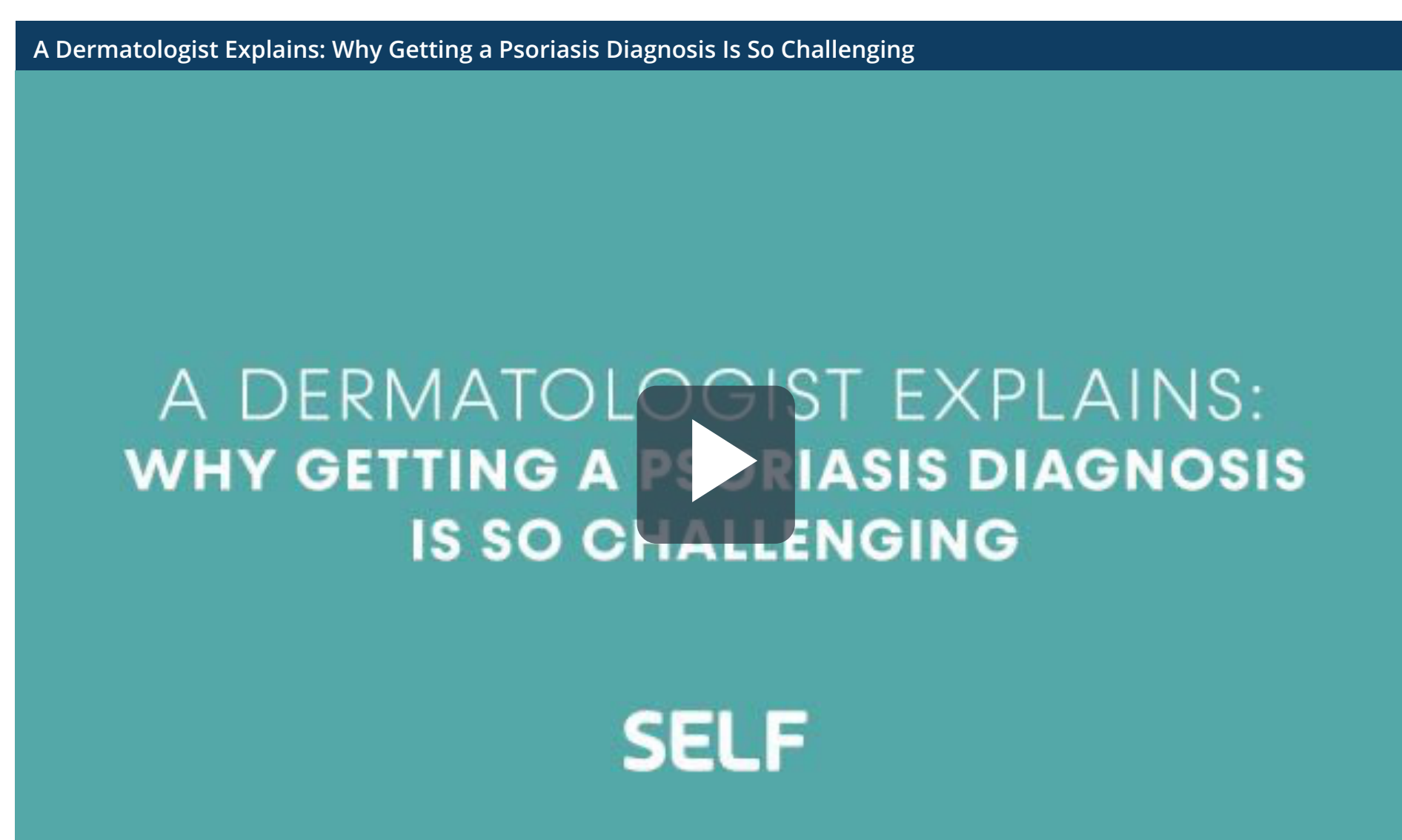
The exhibition title alludes to the utilitarian and defensive capacities of teeth and fingernails. But there's more at issue in several prints that center on stylized images of human teeth in cross-section, like those seen in a dental x-rays. Here, the tooth becomes a metaphor for internal, psychological processes.

Several of these tooth cross-sections frame a pair of open-mouthed figures facing each other, as if engaged in a dialog, either conversational or argumentative. In one of these, "Root of the Matter," a shovel is poised directly above the tooth, as if ready for use in uprooting or unearthing something.

The cross-sectioned tooth in "Wisdom" reveals a single disembodied eye, while the one titled "Growth" centers on a Valentine heart and has a plant growing from its crown.

One of the show's recurring themes is existential struggle, as reflected in a pair of images featuring a human face and hands. One of them bears the title "Holding Myself Up," while the other is titled "Sometimes it's all I do."

In a related vein are several calligraphed drawings, each consisting of multicolored upper-case letters that fill the paper. One poses a question with no room for a question mark — "CAN WE BE US IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THIS" — and another admits emotional uncertainty: "I AM NOT EVEN SURE I WANT TO KEEP THIS TOGETHER."



On the surface, these texts are ambiguous, but they suggest an underlying emotional current that leaves them wide open to viewers' interpretations. They're haunting that way.

The COVID pandemic is an overworked subject, and Anderson doesn't mention it in her statement, but it clearly forms an unspecified thematic backdrop for much of her work in this show. Many of these pieces — probably most of them — reflect or respond to the stresses of a pandemic-limited life and other recent social traumas.

The calligraphed black-on-white-on-black text in one piece reads like a cryptic reference to this contextual aspect of the work: "IT'S A THING HOVERING A SHADOW AN ELLIPSIS WHERE IS A LOOSE THREAD A COMFORTING SNAG—GATHERING THOUGHTS TOGETHER? A KNOT? A PERIOD?"

Sometimes a half-formed thought is enough to make the point. And sometimes it is the point.

Text has long been central to Anderson's art, but some of her best pieces here play it down or dispense with it entirely to let imagery do the work. These generally center on or include photo-derived images of old houses, knives, flowers and a quirky, hybrid humanoid/bird figure that seems to function as a kind of alter-ego for Anderson.

This odd figure is the star of "Bird Girl Dries Out," a highlight of the show and one of its two largest works, printed and painted on a bedspread. A single human eye completely fills the figure's beaked head, and its winged body trails a photo-derived pair of bare human feet whose scale places them in the near foreground. An emblem of self-transcendence, it hovers in front of an iconic, mask-faced figure that occupies the entire background, expressionistically rendered in bold, celestial colors. It's the show's most upbeat piece for sure.

The other large bedspread piece strikes a thematic counterpoint, as indicated by its title, "The rug is gone again." Another of those cryptic phrases favored in this selection of Anderson's work, the title clearly alludes to physical or psychic instability. No bird girl here, just a few houses printed in lurid shades of blue and violet. They might be abandoned, or they might harbor anti-social recluses.

As in the previously discussed piece, the upper background is filled with a monumental, stylized godlike figure, in this case rendered in predominant, optimistic shades of pink and yellow, like a prop from a make-believe tropical paradise.

In keeping with Anderson's reference to weaponry in her posted statement, the show includes several pieces in which knives play a prominent role. The most striking and provocative of these is "Sharpen Your Knives," in which a knife appears to be suspended in mid-air in front of a young woman standing behind a low fence or barrier in front of an old house under a sunlit sky with birds on the wing.

A stylized plantlike form grows up from the bottom, where close attention is required to read the lines of characteristically cryptic text: "WHAT HAVE YOU MADE HAPPEN? WHAT HAVE YOU NAILED TO THE WALL ... DO YOU TEST YOUR KNIVES ON FRESH TOMATOES? DO YOU SHARPEN THEM ON UNSUSPECTING SOULS?"

There are of course no real knives in sight, and nothing else potentially dangerous, but if close attention is paid, this exhibition promises to sharpen eyes and minds.

**Want to go?**

**What:** Woodie Anderson's exhibit "Tooth and Nail: Fragments"

**Where:** Artworks Gallery, 564 Trade St., Winston-Salem

**When:** Through June 26

**Gallery hours:** Noon-3 p.m. Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, 1-4 p.m. Sunday and by appointment at [shop@artworks-gallery.org](mailto:shop@artworks-gallery.org).

**Information:** 336-723-5890 or [artworks-gallery.org](http://artworks-gallery.org)

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