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Wood as medium and subject: Don Green exhibits sculptures and landscape images in solo show at Artworks

TOM PATTERSON Special Correspondent

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An untitled sculpture by Don Green.

Jessica Tefft, provided

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About three years ago, local artist Don Green pulled out all the stops in a career retrospective at Artworks Gallery in Winston-Salem, where he has been an exhibiting member since 1994. One of the largest solo exhibitions ever mounted at the gallery, it brought together more than 50 years of Green's paintings and sculptures.

Although not nearly so ambitious, Green's current show at Artworks catches local viewers up with his latest explorations in wood, which for him is both medium and subject. The sculptures are largely abstract, but wood is their main medium, while wooded landscapes are the subjects of the drawings and paintings.

Green is no hobbyist dabbler. He holds art degrees from Wesleyan University and the University of Wisconsin, and he has taught art at the university level. He also holds an advertising-arts degree (from the American Academy of Art in Chicago). He has been more successful supporting himself in the latter field, but he takes a serious approach to his work as a fine artist.

In a printed statement for his 2019 retrospective, Green defined himself primarily as a sculptor. Here again, his sculptures physically dominate the show, although there are only six of them. Press information on the current show states that all were made from wood salvaged from a recent tree-clearing at Reynolda Gardens.

Green's appreciation for natural form is evident in the wood grain, which he consistently highlights. At the same time, he performs extensive manipulations to shape and polish his wood components according to his own aesthetic intentions.

Green tends to favor smoothly rounded forms that resemble eggs or stones polished by wind or water. Sometimes he combines several related forms of differing sizes and shapes, and sometimes he sets them off alongside angular or columnar forms. There are hints of anthropomorphism, as in an untitled sculpture roughly the height of an average adult.

The latter piece — the show's largest — rests on its own built-in base, a repurposed iron truck wheel, on which three bulbous, polished wood forms appear to be precariously balanced.

Green's other sculptures are smaller and independent of the pedestals they're displayed on. The series title for three of them — "Magnolia Stump" — indicates that they're made from the stump of a single magnolia tree. In all three cases, Green was evidently so taken with the wood's inherent characteristics that he left it free of the glossy finish he used on his other sculptures.

Grounding this selection in traditional landscape art are eight pastel drawings that look like they were sketched firsthand rather than from photographs. The technique is loose and expressionistic, but the colors are true to nature, and the scenes are vivid enough. Some are recognizably from the local landscape — on the grounds of Reynolda House, for example, and at Salem Lake.

Three of the show's four paintings are abstracted landscapes from a recent series Green calls "My Nature Distilled." Individual subtitles identify each with a specific month in a sequence of three — "October," "November" and "December." Presumably they were painted last fall in the lead-up to this show's opening.

Here, landscapes are reduced to their colors and loosely geometric, interlocking shapes, with results that suggest big, blurry jigsaw puzzles. The visual charge is particularly strong in the October painting, with its bold colors presumably inspired by autumn leaves.

The latter painting in particular resonates with the exhibition's anomaly, a small, abstract oil painting from 1997. Its title, "Green Dragon's Lair," directs attention to a green blob just left of center and daubed with black to suggest an open-mouthed face peering out of cave. It doesn't take much imagination to see the surrounding loose shapes and colors as a multihued landscape. They also resemble the fluid grain of natural wood.

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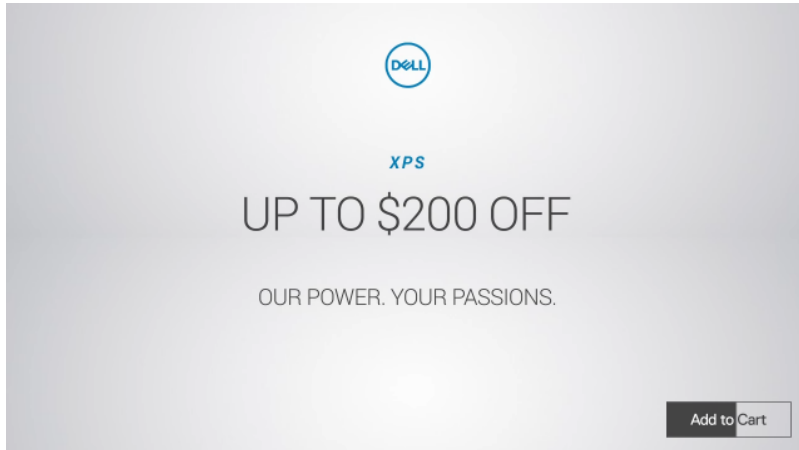
What: "Sculpture, Paintings, and Drawings" by Don Green

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

When: Through Saturday

Gallery hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, 1-4 p.m. Sunday and by appointment by emailing shop@artworks-gallery.org.

Information: 336-723-5890 or artworks-gallery.org



A promotional banner for Dell XPS laptops. At the top center is the Dell logo (a circle with 'DELL' inside). Below it, the text 'XPS' is written in a blue, sans-serif font. The main headline reads 'UP TO \$200 OFF' in a large, dark, sans-serif font. Underneath, the tagline 'OUR POWER. YOUR PASSIONS.' is displayed in a smaller, dark, sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner, there is a dark rectangular button with the text 'Add to Cart' in white.

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