

"TO BUILD A NEST" EXHIBIT OPENS

Among the Birds: Artist Mary Beth Magyar Bridges Life and Loss

interview by NICOLE NFOYOYIM-HARA • photos by KEN KLOTZBACH

With her artist studio facing high into a lush thicket of trees, multi-disciplinary artist Mary Beth Magyar watched the daily comings and goings of the birds through her window. And there, perched among them, she began drawing the nests around her. The result is a textured body of work as intricate and elegantly crafted as the nests that inspired it.

With characteristic candor, the artist talks to 507 Magazine about life, loss, community, and of course, birds.

How did your research shape your sculptures?

I started reading more and more about crows. Their nests are really high up and they collect sticks that are very specific in terms of diameter and how straight they are. They take those sticks and build these big round nests. So I decided to make my own nests—not to copy the birds, who do it so well already—but creating something completely new through sculpture.

The sticks in my sculptures are painted and made of clay. They aren't glazed and just have a great texture. Each batch of sticks I made was a little different, just like wood in a real nest. It's amazing how the more you stack the sticks the stronger the structure of the nest becomes. And once in a while it's like Jenga, with one piece keeping all the others together, and others you can just pull right out. Each nest I built is stacked in this way—there's nothing holding them together.

Each time I build the nests it's different. Sometimes I drop the sticks and I'm totally fine with that. When a bird's nest falls apart, it's not like a bird goes, sits down and has a beer with their friend. They get right back to work. So I break things while I'm building and I'm not particularly attached to any of it. In a way it's a bit like building yourself back up as you go through different stages of life.



Curated by Susannah Magers, Deputy Director and Curator at RAC, "To Build a Nest" features Magyar's drawings and sculptures, as well as a video of "The Beginning Starts with An Ending," a large scale effigy the artist built on a farm in Eyota.

In your work *The Beginning Starts With An Ending*, you build a large effigy and then burn it. What significance does this particular piece have for you and this body of work?

I made a big nest on a farm in Eyota and I had liked the idea of burning it and finding some substructure left behind that I could still work with or even leaving it to grow. Actually, while I was building the nest on the farm there were some birds already making a nest in it.

I like the idea of nests because so many people can identify with that image in some way. A friend of mine had gotten really upset when I burned this nest on the farm because she thought it was like I was burning my own home—my own family.



Rochester because my husband got a job at Mayo. Rochester is so small, but the Rochester Art Center is amazing. Before this, I lived in a town that was three times the size of Rochester. There was nothing like the Art Center and the arts scene was just paltry. So when I saw the arts here, I

was impressed. Over a year ago, some local artists and I decided to get together to form an artist group. We came together with some artists from Winona as well. It's been great to just work with artists and share space with them. I've felt hugely supported in this town. I can't tell you how important it is that you can talk about your work in a community and you're not looked at like

a crazy person for making art, for being an artist.

But the piece is about the loss of a very dear friend and about life and death, beginnings and ends. There's something cathartic about being able to let things go. There's also this possibility for new growth. I find it really interesting how different people have completely different reactions or connections to the work. The whole exhibition with the video, the nest sculptures and the drawings all weave together. I'd like people to move through the space and be drawn in, look at the shadows of the nests as the light changes in the gallery and walk right up to the drawings and see the lines and the smudge marks on the paper.

As a local artist, how have you found community and support in Rochester?

Like a few other artists here, I moved to

IF YOU GO

What

To Build a Nest

When

Opening reception 6 p.m. Thursday October 6.

Where

Rochester Art Center, 40 Civic Center Dr. SE, Rochester

For more information

rochesterartcenter.org