

Furniture takes on new life in Doell West's hands

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At the heart of Doell West's cozy Monticello farmhouse is usually a single piece of furniture. Her living room transforms into an art studio as she divines what exactly the piece is telling her to paint on it.

She is not concerned with matching pieces to already existing décor. Instead, her daily life revolves around shaping the work bit by bit —whether it's a chair, an antique desk or a side table. It stays in her line of sight until one

or another of its nuances catches her eye, then she takes her brush in hand and gets to painting.



West

“I have an art room, but I love to work in the center of things,” says West, who admits the challenges to working this way as well. “My cats really like it because they spend a lot of time sitting on top of pieces. I also have a Labrador with an active tail that likes to wipe across wet paint.”

Currently, West's hand-painted fur-

niture works are on display at the Gadsden Arts Center & Museum's Munroe Family Community Gallery. Curator Angie Barry designed the “Fanciful Spaces” exhibition, which can be experienced through Aug. 29, so that the furniture is reflected in West's hand-painted mirrors. The end result is a 360-degree view of her pieces from every angle.

“I was just amazed at how well she composes it in a visually pleasing way,” says West. “You see the pieces constantly whether your back is to them or not. That mirror's reflection is yet another piece in itself.”

West has worked in many mediums including oil paints, blacklight photography and drawing. She began painting furniture after a car accident that seriously injured her back. Her artistic side was frustrated with the limited mobility she had during her recovery period until a friend brought her an antique brass drain embedded in a piece of wood and asked if she could paint it. The small detailed work was a perfect fit.

Furniture continues to find its way to West. Her sister brings thrift shop finds

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West

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along on visits while friends will call her when they happen upon an antique piece. West typically evaluates the wood, and if the “bones” are good, she’ll bring the forlorn piece back to life in bursts of color.

“I realized how much I enjoyed taking a neglected piece that looks like it’s had its time and turn it into functional art,” says West. “The piece dictates to me the design. There’s very rarely a piece I start where I know what I’m going to do, and I enjoy watching it transform.”

West considers herself born into art. Her mother was a high school art teacher who instilled in her a sense of work ethic and dedication to visual problem solving. She attended a graphic arts program but always found satisfaction in teaching herself new mediums.

When it comes to furniture, West looks to images of old-world donkey carts from Rome and Mexico for inspiration. Each incorporates brightly colored designs to enhance the character of the piece.

West uses a wide array of colors and remains fearless when it comes to her creativity. Every piece of furniture is first coated in opaque black, and if a design isn’t working for her, she has no qualms about blacking it out and starting over again.

“I think in terms of filling negative space when I’m working on a piece,” says West. “Everything gets based out in black before I paint because then my colors are true. When you put a yellow on there, it is a true yellow.”

One of her favorite pieces in the “Fanciful Spaces” exhibit is a small side table with a sea turtle at its center. The entire table is an ode to the ocean with scallop shells along its spindly legs. Another is a Victorian style chair that took three days to finish. She became obsessed with the lines of the arms and curves at the top, the physical shape in harmony with her color combinations and ideas.

In her home, West is especially fond of an antique sewing cabinet that she is unable to part with or sell. Her favorite commissions are often for clients who share a similar emotional attachment to a piece of furniture. She painted a high-chair for one friend so that it could remain a family heirloom for their grandchildren. For another work, West



The “Fanciful Spaces” exhibition, which can be experienced through Aug. 29, shows the furniture reflected in West’s hand-painted mirrors. The end result is a 360-degree view of her pieces from every angle. DOELL WEST



West’s hand-painted furniture works are on display in Quincy. DOELL WEST



West is showing hand-painted furniture at the Gadsden Arts Center. DOELL WEST

If you go

What: Fanciful Spaces

When: 10:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Wednesday to Saturdays through Aug. 29

Where: Gadsden Arts Center & Museum, 13 N. Madison Street, Quincy

Cost: \$5 nonmembers, \$3 college students, children and museum members are free

Contact: To make a reservation, visit <https://gadsdenarts.org/visit> or call 850-627-5023.

adorned a table and chair set with images of a family’s dog and farm animals that now “lives” in their son’s room.

“I like doing family heirlooms because it gives it a new purpose,” says West. “When I started this journey, it

was a selfish journey to put my mind, body and soul into a better place. The response I have gotten from people has been lovely and I love to get photos of a sold piece in its new home to see where it is. It’s like passing it on.”

West is especially proud to have been welcomed into the Gadsden for a second exhibition. Attendees can make a reservation to see the gallery in person, or check it out online.

“I love that [Gadsden] appreciated

my type of medium as art and saw the beauty,” says West. “It means the world to me, because it’s not just a piece of furniture, it’s a piece of art.”

She pauses, then laughs.

“And it doesn’t have to match your couch.”

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).