



VISUAL ARTS

# Judy Onofrio's cow-bone sculptures confront life and death

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

JULY 16, 2014 07:00 AM, UPDATED JULY 15, 2014 11:59 AM



"Whirl" by Judy Onofrio E.G. SCHEMPF

From the bones of cattle, Judy Onofrio has created beautiful and macabre sculptures in her solo exhibition "Full Circle" at Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art.

Although Onofrio has used bones in previous bodies of work, "Full Circle" is the Minnesota-based artist's first series of sculptures to utilize only paint and bones, creating forms that can feel both heavenly and hellish, confronting the view



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Made from the remains of cows, most of the sculptures in “Full Circle” feature a specific bone taken from several skeletons. Works like “Basket,” “Cauldron” and “Coffer,” for instance, are formed from dozens of ribs, stacked and woven together into large, hollow cylinders.

Onofrio describes these works as vessels, which has a double meaning, both in the sculptures’ similarities to ceramic pottery vessels and the spiritual notion of a vessel for a soul.

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“Shift” is built from vertebrae interlocking like zippers. Seated on a clear glass pedestal, the spines twist and warp, giving the object the appearance of a necromantic caterpillar or a centipede out of a monster movie.

“Current” couldn’t be more different. The hard, overlapping bovine shoulder blades gracefully nestle into one another, creating an illusion that they might be made from a much softer material, like starched fabric or wet bow-tie pasta.

“Rose” is a wall-mounted sculpture made from dozens of cattle jaws, stacked upon one another and radiating out, not unlike unfurled rose petals. Onofrio has painted some of the teeth with a golden pigment that appears to be a natural yellow stain from a distance but on close inspection has a metallic sparkle.

Another work, “Whirl,” uses jaws in a similar form but is placed on a pedestal instead. These two sculptures, with their hundreds of teeth, are perhaps the most horrific in the exhibition and wouldn’t be out of place on a heavy metal album cover.

“Full Circle” is both entrancing and repelling. It’s an unusual way to view this many bones outside a natural history museum. And while the pure white sculptures feel peaceful and clean, they could easily be props for a gory horror flick. One inevitably moves between two thoughts: “I am looking at beautiful art” and “I am looking at the skeletal remains of at least a hundred cows.”

As the exhibition title suggests, “Full Circle” is precisely about this attraction and repulsion to life and death.

Although art using bones and taxidermy is nothing new, “Full Circle” is not generic or predictable. It also issues a challenge to its viewers: Onofrio is comfortable staring at death head on. Are you?

On display

“Judy Onofrio: Full Circle” runs through July 26 at Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art, 2004 Baltimore Ave. Hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and by appointment. For more information, call 816-221-