

# ARTS

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BY KEVIN LEE

## **New artist brings exploratory show to town**

Posted by Kevin Lee | Sep 15, 2021 | Artifice | 0 |

If the artistic process is about searching, then Jenny Day has it down. She's spent her life in motion, toward locales, goals and honest expression.

"My husband says I'm like a train engine, just moving no matter what. I've had that drive for a long time. That's when I feel best," Day said.

That search in physical form hits Mobile when Day's art exhibit "Needs More Wonder (Every Tether Has Two Ends)" opens at Alabama Contemporary Art Center (301 Conti St.) Sept. 17. The collection of nine paintings and six sculptures — "two [sculptures] are the largest I've ever done" — is the Santa Fe, New Mexico-based artist's first in Mobile, but not in the region. Her website listed shows at New Orleans's Jonathan Ferrara Gallery as far back as 2016.

Breaking ground in a new venue suits Day's exploratory nature. She's lived in four corners of the nation: Southern California, Maine, Alaska and Florida. The last of those gave her a crash course on one of the Azalea City's most enduring features.

"I've got really curly hair, so the humidity down there was kind of a lot," Day said, laughing.

Allusion to her new exhibit's themes of "a shadow world, where a blissful, psychedelic reverence for nature exists" shone through in her memories of those former homes. New England autumn often moved her to abruptly pull onto roadsides and drink in the scenery.

"It's incredible. Those reds and oranges and the complexity and brilliance of color. I was stunned. Even talking about it is giving me goosebumps," Day said.

The same amazement gilded her recollection of stretching out in her Alaska driveway and watching the aurora borealis dance overhead.

"They made me feel small, but in a really good way," Day said.

Things are different in northern New Mexico. There are no northern lights. What little autumnal foliage exists is yellow, but she still finds inspiration in her regular running routine. While jogging the countryside, she gets to a psychological state where she connects with her surroundings at a deeper level.

“There will be birds and butterflies and flowers, or maybe the sun will hit the snow and cause reflections, these rainbows in the snow, and you just forget about everything, and you are in that moment. I think nature can do that and that’s definitely in this work too,” Day said.

Even accidents are opportunities. She had a fall while running and the abrasions brought their own epiphany.

“Skinning my knee and my elbow reminded me of being little. I relish moments where I contact whatever makes you that vulnerable,” Day said.

The high desert comes through in other ways. Her home studio boasts a magnificent panorama of the hills and valleys at their 7,500-foot elevation that has informed Day’s work. Through collage and other media, her canvases bear layers born from her subconscious.

“I realized that I often put this tiny little detail in the background of a lot of the paintings, and it’s like the view from my studio,” Day said.

She has noticed similar trends in the past. While in Florida, Day said her paintings became “green and swampy with hot pink.” She noted eucalyptus plants in a recent painting, an unconscious artifact of her California youth. Elements from Alaska elbow in, too. The yellow from New Mexico flora has crept into her work recently. So has the vastness of its sky.

“I think now it’s more about like capturing the feeling of a place or the memory of a place and I feel like I’m not getting in the way of that the way I used to,” Day said.

Call it another sign she is pushing filters aside. She’s also branching out from her comfort zone with three-dimensional work, only the second of her shows to feature sculpture. It’s an attempt to create more of an “installation experience” for her exhibits.

“There are lots of little pieces attached, like kind of encrusted with flowers, junk and trash. I’ve started adding animals and sort of a narrative element in the last couple of years,” Day said.

Her show’s subtitle, about two-ended tethers? Imagery shows a “magical” world still anchored in sharper realities.

Day won’t be on hand for the exhibit opening. Instead, she will have a gallery talk closer to its Dec. 30 conclusion. She hopes the local population will be further beyond the recent pandemic surge.

“They warned me to get my vaccine booster first,” Day said.