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*Maggie Maggio, Temptation, 2012 14 x 14 x 5 inches, polymer
photo: Courtney Frisse*

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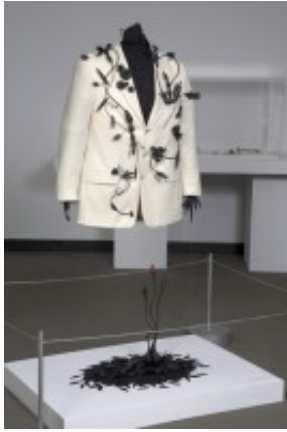
(in)Organic at Racine Art Museum

A small gem of an exhibition, “(in)Organic” is now open at the [Racine Art Museum](#), in Racine, Wisconsin (Oct 12, 2014-Feb 1, 2015). Curated by Lena Vigna, the show features work by a range of artists who investigate the interrelationship of the natural world and humans. Their varied, mixed media artwork is innovative, colorful and offers plenty of visual richness for the eye. Artist’s concerns touch upon social, historical as well as environmental issues as they relate to nature. Approaches include manipulating scale and materials in unexpected ways. For instance, visitors can see an enormous knitted yarn flower, *Tiger Lily*, by Tatyana Yanishevsky hanging overhead directly across the gallery from, Jasmyne Graybill’s spores of polymer that crawl over the surface of porcelain plates. Mid way between, Harriete Estel Berman’s oversized bracelet created from slivers of recycled plastic reminds one of tentacles or ostrich feathers circling a wrist.



Harriete Estel Berman, RECYCLE: Fuchsia with Black Accent, 2011, 9 x 12 x 12 inches closed, recycled plastic, photo: Aryn Shelander

As a mixed media exhibition, (in)Organic happens to include seven artists who work in polymer. Within this group there also is great diversity.



Jeffrey Lloyd Dever, Whence from a Darkling Heart, 2014, 62" h x 28" w x 18" d, polymer, men's sport coat, repurposed and recycled materials, photo: Jon Bolton

While both Jasmyne Graybill and Jeffrey Lloyd Dever connect the organic directly to something man-made, their approaches diverge. Graybill's textured presentation of mold or fungus suggests an infestation of growth onto inanimate form that hints of creeping domination. Dever's piece portrays black tendrils and pods winding all around a man's classic white sport coat with a pile of black leaves and three reaching stems, one topped with a red pod, on the ground below. Is the mound of leaves beneath the jacket the origin of the vines or indicative of declining life that has dropped from above? Since the vegetation emerges from sleeves and a pocket, is it stylized and elegantly ornamental or is the black plant life a menace to the inhabitant of the jacket? Is the single red pod a last gasp of what was or a sign of hope presented through the vibrancy of color and the upward gesture?

Other artists have different ways of relating to nature. Melanie West's work is inspired by natural extravagance and organic cellular structure as viewed through a microscope. Kathleen Dustin's *Zinnia Bud Purse* (2007) and *Blooming Hibiscus Purse* (2008) magnifies both flowers to a size that is far larger than life. These two artists are both investigating issues of veracity and scale, but through different kinds of lenses.

Maggie Maggio's jewelry is composed of pinched polymer ropes, which call to mind coiling vines or vertebrae-like segments and often have a forked or tapered end. Her designs are evocative of both plant and reptilian life as they wrap around the body.

Maggio's title for one piece pictured above, *Temptation*, perhaps references the Garden of Eden and Eve in the interplay of the female form and these sinuous adornments.

Leslie Blackford's mushrooms, birds and other bits of the forest floor are more obviously representational. Her polymer forms are frequently combined with rocks, feathers or actual plant material. Blackford's artwork has a primitive, folksy quality to it and conjures up threads of narrative stories that might emerge from the woods.



Leslie Blackford, The Bird and the Blackberry, 2014, 24 " adjustable necklace, polymer, oil paint, metal

photo: Leslie Blackford

The exhibit continues in an upper gallery with the [\(in\)Organic Labs](#). Two artists, Edgar Mosa and Wendy Wallin Malinow were invited to assemble a body of work specifically for the show. Their styles are distinctive and very personal. Mosa works in wood and metal to create cerebral and sensual evocations of natural forms. Malinow, who creates in many mediums, including lots of polymer, has an interest in the grittier side of life. Eerie looking animals, internal organs, skeletons and Nature's debris are all regular motifs. One might say that Malinow's art depicts Nature turned inside out. And yet, despite the decay, bones and guts, there is a strong life force throughout Malinow's work. She often portrays variations on the heart, the organ central to life. Her colors are vibrant and even cheerful. Her sculpted animals are presented in a moment of arrested action while small signs of hope, such as an un-hatched egg or a flower bud waiting to bloom, are tucked into compositions filled with an abundance of form, color and detail.

As the Polymer Art Archive is interested specifically in polymer art, (In)Organic demonstrates an integration of polymer art with works of art made from other materials. Visitors who ignore the signage on “materials” surely will view the show with no sense of the newness or rarity of polymer in the museum context. For that seamless blending of mediums, as well as an overall lushness of ideas and visual presentations, Vigna’s careful nurturing of (in)Organic is a success.

Artists whose works are featured in (in)Organic include: Harriete Estel Berman, Leslie Blackford, Peter Chang, Jeffrey Lloyd Dever, Jessica Drenk, Kathleen Dustin, Nora Fok, Jasmyne Graybill, Amy Gross, Maggie Maggio, Bruce Metcalf, Keizuke Mizuno, Jillian Moore, Masako Onodera, Katie Poterala, Leisa Rich, Michelle Samour, Bonnie Seeman, Melanie West, and Tatayna Yanishevsky

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