

Collectors share their treasures in UWM exhibit

Nyasha Stone, Special to the Journal Sentinel Published 3:10 p.m. CT Feb. 14, 2017



(Photo: Justin Gordon)

You may never see the paintings and sculptures on display at the [Union Art Gallery](http://uwm.edu/studentinvolvement/arts-and-entertainment/union-art-gallery/) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee again, unless you're invited to a collector's home. Local art lovers loaned works from their own bedrooms and living rooms for the "Sneak Peek: A Look at Private Collections" exhibit, which closes Feb. 17.

"Sneak Peek" showcases modern art, folkloric works, even handmade wood furniture; some works were made by local artists.

The work on display ranges from small to massive. Artist Della Wells is represented by one of "Della's People," a pillow-shaped doll fashioned into the painted image of a black woman, with actual spectacles. Michael Kalish transformed blue, red and yellow pieces of old license plates into a black-edged "Butterfly."

Some collectors brought framed concert posters while others loaned their African-American themed artwork.

During a panel discussion Friday evening, eight of the thirteen collectors included in the exhibit shared stories about their artwork. Each collector had a different tale.

"I want to keep collecting till I die," said the youngest member of the panel, Sequoia Blackwell, 14.

Blackwell brought the African-American themed display. Despite her youth, she's been collecting for years, given a head start by her artistic aunt, Della Wells, who began secretly collecting art for her niece. Blackwell brought her favorite piece from her private collection: "Wait," a drawing from her Aunt Della's Little Colored Girls Series. This black-and-white drawing with red touches depicts a cluster of young black women sitting, talking and standing.

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Teenage collector Sequoia Blackwell treasures a drawing by her aunt, the artist Della Wells. (Photo: Justin Gordon)

"It has a message; you can learn from it," Blackwell said.

The panelists agreed their collecting is driven by passion, not by money.

"My house feels soulful, that's why I collect art," said panelist Carole Grgich.

"Sneak Peek: A Look at Private Collections" continues through Feb. 17 at the UWM Union Art Gallery, 2200 E. Kenwood Blvd.

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