

## Review: Seattle sculptor Humaira Abid blends dazzling craft, potent content in 'Red'

Seattle sculptor Humaira Abid packs a visceral punch with the content of her new show at ArtXchange Gallery.

By Michael Upchurch  
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Humaira Abid can make wood look as flexible as a rubber hot-water bottle or as hard as a cast-iron faucet. She can make it curve and curl — or turn into shoes and shoelaces.

She can even transform it into a shirt, trousers, jacket and dress that hang with convincing limpness from stainless-steel hangers in an open clothes closet.

The tour de force of craft on display in "Red," Abid's new show of sculptures and drawings, would be more than enough to warrant a trip to ArtXchange Gallery (where it's up until April 30). But Abid, a Pakistani artist who divides her time between Seattle and Lahore, also packs a visceral punch with her content.

"Red," her first solo exhibit in Seattle, contemplates the female presence in Islamic society, with a special emphasis on the role of motherhood. (Pacifiers, again in wood, turn up in almost every other piece.)

Some of her inspiration is autobiographical, she says, but her work also goes "beyond private concerns to speak of ... larger social problems." Recurring images of miscarriage, for instance, "do not just point towards a woman's miscarriage but also miscarriage of justice."

That said, there's a strong spirit of play in the show, too. A consummate illusionist, Abid delights in pushing at the boundaries of what wood can do. In a series of pieces titled "Sculptor's Drawing Play," she makes 3-D effects — light switches, a shirt pocket with a razor in it — pop out of two-dimensional surfaces in the most unlikely ways.

Abid uses pine, mahogany, black limba and other woods to create her oddly eloquent everyday objects. In this particular show, she makes dramatic use of red wood stain, using the color to probe deep into issues of fertility and mortality.



Several installations use the color to denote pure loss. In "Miscarriage," blood leaks from the third of nine lined-up faucets, one for each month of pregnancy. In "Breakdown in the Closet," four wardrobe items hang from their hangers in their natural mahogany colors. But a baby's onesie, in alarm-bell red (stained pine), is cast over the lower lip of the closet door — less a discard than a painful bereavement.

"Hamstrung" uses red to more riddlelike, witty effect. Here Abid laces two shoes together in such a way that no one could possibly walk in them. The cheerful, ruddy hue of the laces adds pizzazz to the absurdity of the predicament portrayed.



A few graphite-and-gouache drawings spin telling variations on the themes in the show. But they don't take the limelight off Abid's genius with wood.

Her gift may find its most beautiful and potent expression with "Faces of Eve," with its two female torsos facing away from each other. One is smooth-surfaced. The other is covered in a raised-type complex of words and phrases that sheathes its feminine shape. Together, Abid's two Eves seem to embody the rhythms, troubles, noise, assaults and fecundity of the world. Indeed, all of "Red" does.

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Above images courtesy of ArtXchange Gallery & Adeel Ahmad

Page 1: Seattle sculptor Humaira Abid used red stain, mahogany and pine to create "Faces of Eve."

Page 2: Abid's "Hamstrung" is attention-catching, but don't try walking in the pine shoes.