

ART REVIEW: Salem State artist celebrates her late mother

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

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Rebecca Plummer Rohloff's work is hardly primitive, or simple, or guileless. In many ways, it is technically complex — tapestries, paintings, sculpture, mixed media in multiple fashionings, and intense scrapbooking. But her "Barefoot Wanderings," on view through Jan. 31 at Salem State University's Winfisky Gallery, has all the earmarks of a childlike creativity.

If you go...

WHAT: "Barefoot Wanderings": Rebecca Plummer Rohloff

WHERE: Winfisky Gallery, Salem State University, 352 Lafayette St., Salem

WHEN: through Jan. 31

ADMISSION: Free. Visit salemstate.edu/arts or call 978-542-7890.

When the child persists in an artist, it doesn't matter how sophisticated the work is. The kid always shows through.

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Inquisitive. Hopeful. Unfettered. Colorful. Unrestricted. Searching. And committed to the sense that things can be better, that ideas are stronger than we believe they are, and that embracing differences is not just a mind-set, but crucial to survival.

The impetus for Plummer's exhibition comes from the death of her mother, Nevada Ellen Plummer, last January. Plummer, a professor of art and design at the university, inherited her mother's extensive crafting materials. What we see in "Barefoot Wanderings" is the confluence of those materials, Plummer's work as a teacher, and her travels, mainly to central America.

Notebooks, ripped apart, pasted together and then painted over, show a sort of travelogue of the mind. A roughly quilted flag becomes a poignant, hectic, stars-and-stripes. "Mind maps" — Rohloff's title for drawings made up mostly of catchphrases — each are focused around a single idea: meditation, diversity, grief. Weavings looking like dream catchers, colorful and symbolic.

Her paintings are particularly sensitive. They show large female figures, in a dream or altered state, capturing a creative essence — a swirling, busy canvas of ideas.

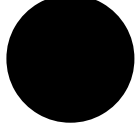
Plummer has closed off the entryway to the gallery with hanging ribbon, so that entering the room becomes a kind of decision to experience a different state of mind. Many things are left behind when you do, and many things revealed.

"Barefoot Wanderings" investigates multiple recurring notions: the female; ships; flying creatures — fairies, butterflies, and birds; maps; circles — lots of circles; and color, the ceremonial, joyous, celebratory colors — pinks, reds, oranges, turquoise — that dominate the south. Tearing, ripping apart, sewing or weaving together — this idea of technique also persists, and infiltrates the viewer's mind while enclosed in the gallery.

The exhibition bears a strong mother/daughter energy, but it's implied and never overstated. "Barefoot Wanderings" is no elegy or rumination on death. A simple needlepoint done by Nevada Plummer in 1980 — "Enjoy the Kaleidoscope of Life," it says — hangs over the guest book. Its idea of welcome — a welcome to the world of ideas, of hope, of exploration, difference and of possibility — feels reassuring and simple. Her daughter — like the best children — honors and transforms that message.

Rebecca Plummer Rohloff's "Barefoot Wanderings: Moving In, Under, and Through" runs through Jan. 31 at Winfisky Gallery on the Salem State University campus. For information call 978-542-7890 or visit www.salemstate.edu/arts.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com



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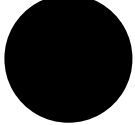
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