

Protzman, Ferdinand. "It's What's Outside That Counts," *The Washington Post*, 24 December 1998.

**The Washington Post**  
*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

## IT'S WHAT'S OUTSIDE THAT COUNTS

MARTHA JACKSON-JARVIS'S NEW APPROACH PUTS HER ART ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL

By Ferdinand Protzman

December 24, 1998 at 12:00 a.m. EST

In recent years, Martha Jackson-Jarvis's sculptures have been lush concoctions made of clay, glass, cement and wood. Using multiple layers of mosaic-like surfaces, fanciful imagery and bright, exhilarating colors, she depicted her dreams, thoughts, emotions and memories. That rich interior life still underlies all of her art, but the focus has shifted dramatically outward of late, resulting in a powerful new group of works that are spare, organic and more abstract and use what are for her uncharacteristic materials such as steel, seashells and live herbs. Both old and new works are on display at Addison/Ripley Fine Arts.

"They are departures from the earlier works," Jackson-Jarvis says of her latest creations. "I'd been doing some site-specific installations and I wanted to transfer some of what I was doing from interior space to a garden, outdoor environment. And these works were a paring down. In a landscape, the strongest element can often be the simplest one."

Some of the works were inspired by her research into the lives of slaves in the antebellum South. But it is not just the horror of slavery that is depicted in her sculptures like "Wall Structure II," but the irrepressible life force of the African American community, a vitality that transcended thralldom. In "Wall Structure II," Jackson-Jarvis outlines the roof and walls of a slave shack in steel on the wall and fills that form with seashells, white mosaic tile, pictures of birds and an enlarged photo of a row of slave quarters with gardens planted around them. Just beneath that structure is a planter in which thyme is growing that also bears another photo of the gardens. It is a tremendously lively, evocative and beguiling piece of sculpture.

Jackson-Jarvis gets almost minimalist in the body of work titled "Rue, Rocks and Robin Eggs." In "Robin Eggs: Nest I," for example, she limns a nest in steel rod and fills it with terra cotta eggs the size of cantaloupes.

"For me, robins have always been the first symbol of spring and I love the blue color of their eggs," she says. "I wanted to pull the nest out of the landscape and magnify it, change its scale. Instead of being minute, it's big, but it still has that primal reaction to the nest and eggs, that sense of nature's beauty and what it symbolizes."

It's that intriguing combination of natural and abstract forms and conceptual elements that makes Jackson-Jarvis's bold attempt to make more from less a success.