



STEVE HOCKSTEIN/FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

Some of the works of artist Florence Wint, collected in her home in Maplewood. Below, Wint stands amid works she's been creating her entire life.

Home is where her art is

Maplewood woman's work, created over a lifetime, to be featured in two shows

ON ART
Dan Bischoff
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Florence Wint's house in Maplewood is full of art. Really full, that is.

Her life's work is stacked carefully throughout the house that her father — who used to run the old Widerkher's Hardware Store in Maplewood — left to her when he died. Narrow corridors allow visitors to walk through.

Paintings, found-object sculpture, collages made with African cotton prints, brightly colored ceramics,



woodcuts and etchings, many of them with animal subjects or nudes, some with political statements, fill almost every room.

It is sometimes hard to say where the house ends and the art begins.

Wint isn't famous — though a select group of artists have been friends and supporters for years. But in the past four months, she's been suddenly getting there.

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Artistic Divergence: A Solo Exhibit by Florence Wint

Where: Brodsky Center Gallery, Heldrich Hotel, 10 Livingston Ave., New Brunswick
When: Through Aug. 31.
How much: Free. Visit theheldrich.com.

The Art of Aging Gracefully: Edwin Havas, Florence Wint and Betty McGeehan

Where: Summit Medical Group, 1 Diamond Hill Road, Berkeley Heights
When: Through the summer. Regular hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays
How much: Free. Visit summitmedicalgroup.com.



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Some works by artist Florence Wint, which she has collected in her Maplewood home, include "Lovers," left, and "The Kiss," center. The works will be shown in two local exhibits.

Artist

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Now 85 and living with her son Ted in New York, Wint's work has been featured in a show of 18 woodcuts at the NY Coo Gallery, a Japanese-American cultural outlet supported by the S&R Foundation in Manhattan.

She's also in two summer-long shows in New Jersey: as one of three older Jersey artists at the Summit Medical Center in Berkeley Heights and in a special one-person show that just opened at the Brodsky Center Gallery in the Heldrich Hotel in New Brunswick.

"Nobody deserves it more than Florence," says artist Deb Mell, who until a few years ago lived in Maplewood, too, in a house overflowing with her own art.

Mell now lives in Cape Cod, but became friends with Wint

when she was caring for her husband, who was blind and had Alzheimer's in his last years. Theodore Wint died 13 years ago. Since then, Florence has been making art with a single-minded fury, most of it marked, like Mell's own, by a faux naïve style and brilliant color.

It's really all Wint ever wanted to do, however much being a wife and mother distracted her.

"I first thought I wanted to be an artist when I was nearly 10," Wint says. "I was kept home sick from school one day and I started to draw. I remember that was when Disney's 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' was very big. (The film was released in 1937.) I started to draw the animals in the film, and I was amazed I could draw them!"

She got into Arts High School in the 1940s on the strength of her drawings. Wint

studied to be a painter back when women didn't do such things, or anyway very few did — first at Wesleyan in Ohio, then at New York University, and finally getting her masters at Columbia. Many of her teachers were well-known abstract expressionists; she took it up, too, and even lived for a time right below Willem De Kooning's studio on 10th Street on the Lower East Side.

But universities didn't give teaching positions to female artists back then. Women worked in elementary schools, occasionally in the high schools. Besides, Wint didn't like disciplining students. She found her place teaching art at senior citizen centers.

And then there was the matter of Florence's marriage. The man she fell in love with in 1958, Theodore Wint, was a Jamaican immigrant, and black. He had four children by a previous marriage (also to a

white woman), and Florence became their mother. Five years later, she and Theodore had Ted Jr. together.

It's hard to quite imagine what this meant in the pre-civil rights era. Today, the president of the United States is of mixed-race heritage; back then, racially mixed marriage was still illegal in several states.

"My whole family disowned me," Wint says. "They'd had their experiences that gave them prejudices. But I didn't let it bother me."

WORKED IN BASEMENT

Because, it goes unlisted, she had her work. Living in Brooklyn, she raised her kids and painted and sculpted in the basement. When her father died in 1980, no one else in the family wanted the house in Maplewood, so Wint started to turn it into a giant studio/warehouse. Her kids were on

their own by then.

Working alone at first, she made things out of whatever came to hand — house paint, ceramic clay, and later bags of thrift shop grommets and tin stars that she applied to altar-like constructions. The birch woodcuts she showed at Aljira, the Hunterdon Art Museum and the Center for Visual Arts in Summit — with their hieratic animals drawn in flickering, nervous detail — were among the most interesting.

There always seemed to be a textile pattern in the back of Wint's mind, but the not-quite-random placement of the figures never settled into a truly repetitive design. It was as if they were beginning to, but could not quite agree on a pattern.

After Yinka Shonibare's installation at the Newark Museum, Wint took up African cotton prints as collage backgrounds. Much of the

work at the Brodsky Gallery in New Brunswick consists of these relatively recent fabric collages.

She works every day. Now hard of hearing, Wint says she's, if anything, more productive. She moved in with Ted after a brief hospital stay last February, and she has studio space with good light.

Her son has been organizing the Maplewood collection so curators and dealers might come in to assess Florence's work. It's not an easy thing — there are thousands of pieces, all arranged higgledy-piggledy on tables, shelves, stacked in rows or piled in the basement. He'd hoped to have the house ready by the Maplewood artists' studio tour at the beginning of June, but it's a bigger job than that.

Then again, Florence isn't going anywhere.

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