

## COOPER

◀FROM 1E

global auctions, have built careers around the exercise.

Colorado artist Susan Cooper has always had a lot of fun in this particular artist's playground. Her work is familiar for many reasons here: She has created a number of highly visible public art pieces at civic buildings; produced shows at Denver's respected William Hays Gallery; and created scores of artworks in various media, including the vibrant collages that lead her current exhibit, "Rearranging," at the Curtis Center for the Arts in Greenwood Village.

But her chairs, also part of this show, deserve special attention, along with her beds, desks, tables, lamps, window frames and other everyday bits of architecture. Cooper renders them in combinations of acrylic and oil paint, wood, resin, bronze and more.

Each piece challenges our relationship with the physical objects around us and highlights the perspectives from which we see them, and with Cooper's pieces, those can be endless.

For her best works, she creates mini-rooms, domestic dioramas with basic chairs and tables, that are part painting, part sculpture. Technically, they are three-dimensional — they have fronts and sides and backs. But she doesn't finish out all of those dimensions. Instead, she presents them as our eyes might capture them from a distance, shortened, angled. The front of a chair may be larger and the back smaller. Things contract as they get farther into the distance.

This, of course, is the way that painters — going back to classical Greece — render perspective in flat works. They take three-dimensional objects and squeeze them as they move toward the horizon, so that we can discern foreground from background.

Cooper does the same squeezing with these familiar pieces, but in sculptural form. She is essentially making paintings out of painted wood. Or, it might be said, she is making sculptures of paintings. Whatever they are — and I challenge everyone to decide when they view them — they make us reconsider how we see both art and real life.

Cooper does this experimenting in other forms. She makes straightforward oil paintings of dining chairs, and bedroom scenes that are constructed from wood and acrylic paint covered in resin. She makes bronze reliefs that capture cutaways of multi-story houses so that you can see inside bedrooms, porches, garages and pool rooms. These pieces have the feel of dollhouses, and when I see them, I'm reminded of a childhood game I played about how we see from single, ordinary chairs and rooms to entire pieces of architecture.

Throughout all of it, she remains focused on her objective, and she helps viewers stay focused by leaving out the presence of humans. Except after hours after hours, and no people in sight to distract us.

There is a link between these domestic scenes and Cooper's newer works, her spectacular collages that are installed directly on the gallery walls, and which inspired the show's title. Because they are also about seeing existing things in fresh ways.

The two-dimensional objects, conceived during the coronavirus pandemic, are made from old materials, sliced and scattered and combined into new forms and colors that are endlessly fascinating to examine.



Susan Cooper's "Rearranging" continues through June 25 at the Curtis Center for the Arts in Greenwood Village. Photos by Ray Mark Kinahl, special to The Denver Post



Susan Cooper re-creates common domestic objects that we take for granted in a way that makes us see them differently. It's the making paintings out of painted wood or sculptures of paintings.



Susan Cooper's studies of an ordinary chair.

The piece "No Travel," for example, is made from cut-up credit cards and plastic hotel keys that have been reconfigured into spirals, fans and shapes that resemble flowers, plates and piano keys. Cooper made it during the pandemic, when the world was shut down and traveling was only a dream.

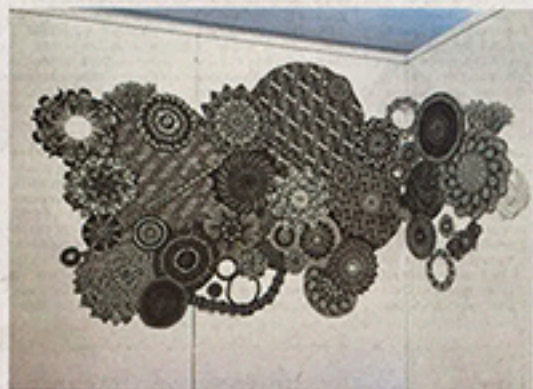
Another flat piece, "Corona Comfort," is made from discarded scraps of Plexiglas left over from the artist's previous projects.

The clear sections come together into a day-glow rainbow of reds, oranges, blues and yellows. With its dramatic, up-and-down lines and straight edges, the collage recalls the many charts and graphs that were projected by the media during the pandemic, tracking infections and unemployment.

The most prominent piece in the exhibit, "Forward and Back," is built from old postcards that advertised Cooper's exhibitions over the years. From a distance,



A detail of Susan Cooper's collage "No Travel" made from expired credit cards and hotel keys.



Susan Cooper's new works were made right on the walls of the Curtis Center for the Arts.



Works like "Forward and Back" are autobiographical because they look back at Susan Cooper's career as an artist.

the work looks organic, like a field of colorful flowers. Up close, it becomes a visual autobiography of her career as bits and pieces of artworks past begin to appear.

"Rearranging" is not as refined as some exhibits can be. There's no catalog or signage; it feels quickly

assembled and improvised. It has a split personality, torn between being a showcase for new work and a complete retrospective. Biologically, one day Cooper gets the deep curatorial dive her career deserves.

But there is a charm to the way "Rearranging" is

**If you go**  
Susan Cooper, "Rearranging," continues through June 25 at the Curtis Center for the Arts, 2345 E Orchard Road, Greenwood Village. It's free. Info: 303.797.1779 or greenwoodvillage.com.

assembled. It's wifely, handmade and relaxed, and it looks swell from every angle at the Curtis Center. And there is something refreshing about not being told how to see the work, as signage would instruct visitors to do.

It's just the artist and the viewer, really, and a lot of interesting chairs.

Ray Mark Kinahl  
media@raymark.com or @raymark