



JENNY TOTH'S "HEARING IMPARROT"

ARTIST JENNY TOTH SHARES HER SOUTH-OF-THE-BORDER MEMORIES AT THE WAGNER COLLEGE GALLERY

## MEXICAN SOUVENIRS

Even a brief visit to Mexico leaves northerners ravished by its blithe day-to-day collision of nature, ancient culture and contemporary concerns.

The encounter informs artist Jenny Toth's "Hecho en Mexico" ("Made in Mexico") at the Wagner College Gallery through April 11.

Toth, who teaches at Wagner, spends time in San Miguel de Allende, the Bajío mountain town that is home to a colony of resident Americans.

She establishes herself there long enough to hire models, make prints, drawings, mixed-media pieces and small, eerie, intricately detailed bronzes of birds. Birds are everywhere in this show. Some are dead and some seem to be surviving miraculously with grievous wounds.

Nopal cactus, the ones with big ear-like paddles, are favorite elements too. Saturated indigenous colors — coral, turquoise, ultramarine — appear in the two-dimensional works, but she uses them with restraint, typically.

Like a Maya artist, Toth flouts the ordinary boundaries. A woman (probably herself) might be morphing into a chicken, a parrot or a cactus.

She combines forms inventively. Etchings are hand-colored, collaged and sewn. Cut-out sections break up the narrative of the piece and undermine the possibility of sentimentality. The work is rich, full of ideas, stories, mysteries.

One of the most straightforward pieces, "Nopal" is a pen-and-pencil study of the cactus. The graphite contributes the

appealing silvery glints on the sheet.

The small bronzes, all made *cire perdu* (lost wax), have articulate feathers, feet, beaks. One has needle-like thorns as if it had crash-landed on a cactus. Art history intervenes at times, but it's on reconfigured terms.

In a nod to Manet's "Olympie," her "Artist and Model" has herself as the observer and a attentive, brown-skinned, sleepy-looking nude male as the object of her gaze.

The gallery, adjacent to the atrium on the main floor of the Wagner College Union building, is open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., with extended hours on Thursdays to 7 p.m.

— MICHAEL J. FRESSOLA,  
arts editor