

# Entertainment

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## ART REVIEW

# Order, disorder collide in collage

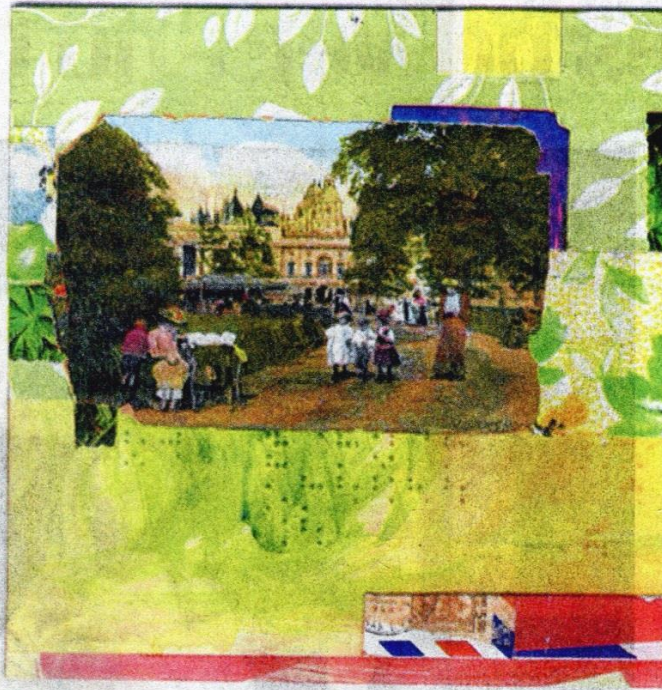
By John Carlos Cantu  
For The Ann Arbor News

Cheryl Dawdy's University of Michigan Health System Gifts of Arts "Reconstructed Landscapes: Collage" is this local artist-musician's latest incarnation of her signature collage.

Dawdy, a singer for the Ann Arbor-based the Chenille Sisters musical trio, received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from U-M. As her Gifts of Art gallery statement said, she "dabbled in different media (printmaking, weaving, natural dyes) until discovering collage." The statement then adds Dawdy appreciates collage art "for its spontaneity and perfect expression" reflecting what she has called her "make it up as you go along" approach to life.

"Expectation invites disappointment," concludes the statement, "but an open mind offers unlimited potential. With that attitude, (Dawdy) works with old postcards, paper scraps and pieces of old wallpaper washed with acrylic paint, creating landscape images some have described as 'wonderful little worlds you want to climb into' and 'the stuff of dreams.'"

"Wonderful little worlds you want to climb into" is an interesting way to describe this kind of art because collage is most certainly a kind of creativity at the edge of consciousness — dreamscapes or otherwise. An age-old artform especially championed by the modernists, collage is the placement of visual signifiers by means of inferred association (at



Cheryl Dawdy's "St. James Park" collage is part of the exhibit at University of Michigan Health System. (courtesy)

best) and disassociation (at its most surreal).

That makes collage a deceptive sort of art because like many modernisms, it seemingly has a touch of simplicity that only reveals its subtle complexity on careful examination. It is, of course, easy enough for anyone to craft (and is now a favorite primary school exercise). But what's essentially a lucky one-off isn't something that can be done repetitively without discipline. And this is where Dawdy's art training insures that her work is of a uniform aesthetic.

There are recurrent motifs in the 15 Dawdy collages on display in her Gifts of Art exhibit. With the single

exception of a single larger composition, each collage in her display is roughly 10 by 12 inches. This scale is significant because it indicates Dawdy's approach isn't quite as arbitrary as it might seem.

Taking the issue of scale into account as well as the repetition of her chosen motifs, and one can see an extraordinary sophistication at play in her work. The arrangement of her compositions yield subtle commonalities that are repeated collage to collage, and it becomes apparent that whether her manipulation of her medium is conscious or unconscious, Dawdy is a talent to reckon with.

Take "St. James Park" as

### IF YOU GO

**Who:** 'Cheryl Dawdy: Reconstructed Landscapes: Collage'  
**When:** Through Oct. 7  
**Where:** University of Michigan Health System Main Corridor Floor 2 Gifts of Art Gallery, 1500 E. Medical Center Drive  
**Gallery hours:** 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., daily  
**Info:** Call 734-936-ARTS

one example of Dawdy's ability to concisely craft collage.

This miniature 10-inch-by-12-inch marvel uses an aged, tinted picture postcard of this famed London park as its central motif. But Dawdy also adds a background garnish of leafy wallpaper (a nod to Art Nouveau) to tie her other visual elements with her theme. And she affixes a foreground sliver of a postage stamp to the other varied vegetative elements of the composition.

There are indeed an incalculable number of ways to put these elements together. Just as there are an equally incalculable number of visual elements Dawdy could have used to craft her artwork.

Dawdy gives us this stylish chance encounter arranged in such a way that the visual clues of her collage cohere in a comforting order. Yet the placement of the work's other elements invite a distinct touch of randomness — and this, too, is part of the work's intricate structure.

In Dawdy's hands, order and disorder are purposefully only a hair's breadth apart.