

# The Boston Globe

## Arts & Reviews

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# Collages with a musical lilt

At 21, artist's vibrant work catches eyes, ears

By Cate McQuaid  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

There's music playing in the Judi Rotenberg Gallery this month. You hear it when you step in the door, and Lorna Williams has attached headphones to several of her art works, each with a different soundtrack. Williams's paper-on-wood collages have a rhythm, a vibrancy, and a wash of emotion that springs from music, and dances with it.

The artist, who is 21 and still an undergrad at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, debuted at Judi Rotenberg two years ago with a dazzling exhibition and an original technique. She fits a photographic image against a plywood panel, positioning it in concert with the wood's grain and knots, and stencils the image on. Then, she collages paper, and sometimes fabric or metallic thread, on top — not in layers, but in slivers that link side by side, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Sometimes she gouges out the plywood to add a different texture. The visually boisterous, moody result captivates the eye.

With this show, it's great to see her push the technique, often raising her collage off of the flat surface of the plywood. The collage becomes sculptural. "Sula's Healing," which refers to the Toni Morrison novel "Sula," depicts a shimmering woman in slips of patterned paper, lushly orchestrated. Her hands rise off the wood panel, graceful paper constructions, and hold a stout stick, which has all the more visual clout because it's a real piece of wood, projecting at an angle from the plywood backing.

"Sula's Healing" doesn't have a soundtrack, but "Olaniyi — Variations of a Bloodline" does, a jazzy, lilting instrumental. In it, a man, swaying, constructed out of ribbons of paper, seems to coalesce from a ground of collage, and dissolve into it in whirls of bright pattern. Williams has filled in several concentric knots with rippling paper. "Olaniyi" is too visually busy; the artist seems to forget that rests give music its pulse.



COURTESY OF JUDI ROTENBERG GALLERY

Lorna Williams's paper-on-wood collages, such as "I of the Storm" (above), often include headphones and each have their own soundtracks

Works where she refrains from filling every corner of ground have more clarity, like "I of the Storm." A Kali-like figure with six arms, wearing headphones, stands against the mostly bare plywood, which suggests a fluid atmosphere around her. Like a musician with a knockout first album, Williams has a lot to live up to with this second show. She pulls it off because she's not content to simply dally in the emotional surge of fine music; she

### Lorna Williams: Work and Worship Stem From the Same Root

At: Judi Rotenberg Gallery, 130 Newbury St.,  
through March 1. 617-437-1518.  
judirotenberg.com

challenges herself technically. That's what makes a good artist.