

# CP City Arts



An installation in its entirety by Mark Sloniker

Courtesy of Mark Sloniker

## Sweater creatures come to life beyond the edge

BY ALEXA HINTON

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Mark Sloniker's imagination never quiets. From the slightest hint of movement glimpsed in his periphery, the brain wheels of his mind unroll a fantasy of characters and scenes.

"There are creatures that live in the ridges of my sweater and when I'm sad they slide out next to my ear and whisper poetry by Octavia Paz," Sloniker said. "There is a large furry beast that lives crammed inside my closet. It doesn't speak. We just stare at each other. When I walk through my neighborhood, the emotions of people in their homes take on form and float out of doors and windows.

"The air is full of life we cannot see," he added.

In a new installation piece at the Twist Art Gallery, Sloniker — a local artist and puppet maker — illustrates a swath from his imagination's secret world. He

**What:** Installation by Mark Sloniker  
**When:** Now through Oct. 27  
**Where:** Twist Art Gallery, 73 Arcade  
**Cost:** Free and open to the public  
**Info:** twistart-gallery.com, (688) 535-5286

transforms one of the simple galleries into a fantastical landscape titled, "Beyond the Luminous Edge."

From the middle of the room, hangs the crux of the installation — a chandelier-like mass of textures, shapes and embedded colors. It is not meant to be a recognizable form or structure. Instead, it invites closer inspection of its materials and scenes — moments captured in time, as if memories were frozen and pushed together in a hanging cluster.

Sloniker uses plastic pieces and molded parts, fur, beads, wire spheres, paper, thread, yam, tubular piping, shrink film, wire, velvet, capsule toys and figurines. The materials form flowers with large, ballooning petals and flowers with slender, pointed petals; wooded scenes; birds; ocean-like creatures with bulging eyes and long tentacles; and nativity characters pepper the installation — a Joseph character amid birds, a wise man riding a dragon, an angel with

clasped hands embedded in a plastic sphere.

From the gallery room's walls hang white snails from which oversized cloth droplets fall to the floor. The swatches of fabric are rainbow smatterings of colors and designs. The idea for the installation began with a set of drawings, Sloniker said.

"When I was going to church, I got really bored — I don't do well with sermons. I can't pay attention, they make me tired and bore me, so I'd draw to keep my attention, keep my hand busy, so I could focus. I started drawing these creatures and imagined them as molecules in the air and they became this big mass of images on a page," Sloniker said.

The installation was inspired by a story Sloniker heard on a National Public Radio (NPR) radio show about neutrinos, hard-to-detect, charged particles that travel through matter close to the speed of light.

"Neutrinos always sounded so dark and mysterious — these particles that are rushing through us four

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**CP** City ArtsImagination lives  
at Twist exhibit

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trillion per second, so it just kind of backed up what I was imagining anyway: the air being alive and full of life. It added more interest because it was timeless — it had seen time and all of history was in these particles, so the piece is a lot about time,” Sloniker said.

The artist chose to use snails, which are primordial, in his piece to represent the guardians of time, and the hanging mass in the center of the room is largely white, except for wisps of color, to blend into the room’s walls and give a feeling of invisibility just like neutrinos, Sloniker said.

A Wisconsin native, Sloniker credits his tireless imagination to the woods around his isolated farmhouse as having nurtured his independent, creative side.

“I wasn’t a very social kid, so I was kind of on my own a lot and left to wander and let my mind go,” he said. “When you are alone in the woods, you tend to imagine things, and anytime you are in a place kind of wild, it stirs up things, so I’d imagine creatures and people and a whole world in there, and you aren’t really going to be interrupted by someone walking through.”

Sloniker works for Animax Designs building puppets for major theme parks all over the world. **CP**