

Megan Heeres uses invasive plants and repurposed ‘junk’ to tend time in Matéria show

It's one of the first shows at the former Simone DeSousa Gallery's new Core City location

By [Randiah Camille Green](#) on Fri, Sep 29, 2023 at 6:00 am



Courtesy of Matéria Gallery

Megan Heeres has created a “forever forest” from unwanted trees and repurposed ductwork.

A pile of concrete slabs and glass window blocks sits outside of Matéria Gallery, slumped against the wall like a haggard traveler taking respite. Tufts of blue paper pulp seem to crawl over the brick stack like moss spreading on downed trees. Vibrant green grass and tomato plants sprout from the rubble.

It's part of Megan Heeres's newest exhibit *Tending Time*, which starts before you even enter the gallery space. It's one of Matéria's first exhibits since the gallery changed its name from Simone DeSousa Gallery and opened a second space in Detroit's Core City neighborhood.

The outdoor component, "Stacks on stacks on stacks," is comprised of chunks of sidewalk, asphalt, and concrete from the surrounding Core City neighborhood. Many of them come from the construction of Core City Park 2, which is being built across the street from the gallery by Prince Concepts. Broken blue tiles from the building that is now Argentine restaurant Barda down the road add more color to the stack of gray bricks.

"Nothing was bought for this. Nothing's new," the artist explains about the exhibit. It's her way of preserving "junk" and observing how development in the area affects the way we interact (or don't) with nature. "A long time ago, this was a forest," she says about the park across the street where trees are being replanted.

Inside, the gallery smells pleasant like fresh grass and decaying wood. Tree branches brush the ceiling inside repurposed ductwork columns. Some of these industrial planters twist and turn like snakes, as plants like Queen Anne's lace jut out the ends. Here, in the "Forever Forest," Heeres transplanted trees and plants that "most people don't want in their yards" like Siberian Elm, White Mulberry, and Japanese Knotwood. These invasive species spread rapidly, often displacing native plants.

Several of the columns are on wheels, encouraging visitors to rearrange the space in whatever way feels most welcoming to them.

The stacks of concrete appear again twice inside the gallery with grains like buckwheat, rye, and millet growing from the blue blobs. Heeres, who makes natural paper, reused the pulp from her papermaking process as a substrate and comes to the gallery to mist the plants every so often.

Are these invasive, non-native plants the ones wreaking havoc on our environment, or are human beings the most destructive living organisms of all?



Courtesy of Matéria Gallery

Megan Heeres's "Stacks on stacks on stacks."

As she walks me through her thought process at the gallery, Heeres compares herself to these invasive species — she is a white artist “taking up space” in a predominantly Black and brown city. Does she belong? Who gets to decide?

Her work feels mysterious, like a formless spirit watching the entire history of the Core City neighborhood, plucking out nanoseconds of the past and rearranging them to converge at the same present moment. Yet even “invasive” plants find their space to grow, belong, and thrive.

Where to see her work: *Tending Time is on display at Matéria Gallery's Core City location until Oct. 7. At 5 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 30, Heeres and “citizen-scientist/tree-lover” Elizabeth Luther will host a Senses Walk and Tree Talk that ends with sharing sumac tea made from plants harvested in the neighborhood. A “[Tending Taste](#)” dinner in the gallery curated by Heeres’s sister, chef Allison Heeres of Corander Kitchen and Farm, is slated for 6–9 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 4; 4725 16th St., Unit C, Detroit; materia-art.com.*