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## Kohler Arts Center Exhibit Offers Space for Quiet Healing

BY MICHAEL MUCKIAN DEC. 20, 2022 9:30 A.M.



PHOTO: JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER

## Angela U. Drakeford: In bloom at the end of the world

Wisconsin's dreary winter may already be taking its toll on your body and soul, and you may be yearning for a quiet green space where you can rest and recuperate. If that's so, look no further than Sheboygan.

In November, the John Michael Kohler Arts Center opened "In bloom at the end of the world," an exhibit by multi-disciplinary artist Angela U. Drakeford that is really like no other. Housed in JMKAC's large glass gallery space, Drakeford's installation is a sanctuary space, a parlor or perhaps living room filled with growing green plants, recordings of bird songs, comfortable furniture, books, pillows and other assorted domestic bric-a-brac.

Unlike most art exhibits that adhere to a strict "don't touch" policy, Drakeford's sanctuary is meant to be entered. Its sofa is meant to be sat on. Its books are meant to be paged through. There are even small notebooks for visitors to record their thoughts and impressions, and then take home with them. It's a place, Drakeford says, designed to promote healing.

"Because of where it is located, with stark winter views just beyond the glass walls, it's a unique experience," says Tanya Gayer, who curated the exhibit. "It's refreshing in one sense and calming and grounding in another."

## Guests Welcome



PHOTO: JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER

Angela U. Drakeford: In bloom at the end of the world

Drakeford smiled at Gayer's description of her work. "I wanted create an installation that felt like an invitation into my home," the artist says. "People should come in as guests and linger as long as they want and find comfort. I like to blur the lines of what people usually do inside an art gallery."



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PHOTO: JOHN MICHAEL  
KOHLER ARTS CENTER

Angela U. Drakeford

A Nebraska native, Drakeford created the space after an extended period tending gardens as part of her own healing process. The artist was impressed with how her extended immersion in nature helped her quell some her own demons that crept into her previous work.

“I have a Black family and I have a white family, and I spend a lot of time in the in-between places,” Drakeford explains. “People didn’t always know how to deal with me, and it’s easy to detect the racism that exists right under the surface.

“My work is still rooted in understanding racism and identity politics, and this exhibit creates the type of space makes it easier for people to be in their bodies and understand more difficult topics,” she adds.

The exhibit, on display until April 16, 2023, is part of JMKAC’s “Ways of Being” theme, wherein artists ask, “What if?” Through the interplay of invitation and engagement, Drakeford’s question is, “What if we took respite?” Her execution of that theme covers a wide array of emotional and physical healing, she says.

“For me there are so many layers,” Drakeford explains. “It’s the best thing I can do to care for Little Angela, the child within me, and this gives me the chance to nourish her. If I acknowledge how much people outside of me also have been harmed, I think of my

practice as a way for people to be soothed and to lessen the harm they encounter.”

The individual notebooks that are given away play a large role in carrying Drakeford’s healing message to visitors to the exhibit. “I have been many Angelas in my life, but now my goal is about sharing concepts and letting you decide if you are open to these ideas of change.”



PHOTO: JOHN MICHAEL  
KOHLER ARTS CENTER

Angela U. Drakeford: In bloom at the end of the world

*“In bloom at the end of the world,” an exhibit by multi-disciplinary artist Angela U. Drakeford is currently on display at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 608 New York Ave., Sheboygan. For more information, visit [jmkac.org](http://jmkac.org).*

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Michael Muckian was the banking and finance writer for the Milwaukee Business Journal and is the author of The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Financing and Accounting and The One-Day MBA in Finance and Accounting.

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