

WORKING ARTIST

From a farm girl's love of earth spring works of clay and grass and all that grows

Rebecca Hutchinson summers in Montana, where sugar beets and prairie grass inspire large, delicate sculptures.

By **Cate McQuaid** Updated December 9, 2025, 1:48 p.m.



Rebecca Hutchinson, who builds sculptures out of clay and local materials she beats down to pulp and forms into handmade paper sheets, in her Rochester studio. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

ROCHESTER — [Rebecca Hutchinson](#) was on the back of a tractor in southwestern Michigan when she recognized she was an artist. Her scientist parents had a small farm, and as a teenager, her summer job was to rake the cut hay into windrows.

“I remember having conversations with myself about how beautiful I wanted the windrows to look,” she said. “I was not just getting the job done. I was engaging in decision making about how the rows were laid on the land. ... I was creating in addition to accomplishing.”

Her eye, her love of the earth and what springs from it, and her research into how plants and animals thrive coalesce in “Exuberance,” her exhibition at Clark Gallery in Lincoln through Jan. 11. The artworks, crafted from paper clay, a blend of natural fibers and ceramics, reflects her work of two decades, from individual wall pieces to massive museum installations. Hutchinson is currently preparing an installation to open in April at the [Yellowstone Art Museum](#) in Billings, Mont., featuring pods up to 27 feet tall made of clay and beet pulp.



A wall piece by sculptor Rebecca Hutchinson. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

The ties between land and community are central to her work; sugar beets are a local industry in Billings. Hutchinson summers in Helena and grows flax there for her practice. She also harvests fiber for making paper from toss-out piles at thrift stores.

“I’m really interested in finding beauty for beauty’s sake, but also cooperativeness, and I keep looking at nature for examples of it,” Hutchinson said.

Prairie grass, for instance. “That’ll go 14 feet to find water but sustains 14 inches of growth above the land,” she said. Examples like that “keep empowering me to make work that is miraculous, in a way.”



Sculptor Rebecca Hutchinson applies a slurry made of clay, paper pulp, and wallpaper adhesive. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Where to find her: clarkgallery.com

Age: 62

Where she grew up: Outside Kalamazoo, Mich.

Lives in: Rochester, Mass., and Helena, Mont.

Making a living: Hutchinson takes art commissions and teaches ceramics at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth.



Working on an installation in progress, sculptor Rebecca Hutchinson adds a layer to a pod built on a ceramic base in her studio. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Studio: The sculptor has two kilns, a Hollander beater for making paper pulp, a worktable, and works in progress arrayed in a converted garage beside her house. In Helena, her studio is in a barn.

What she makes: Wall-mounted sculptures resembling flowers on trellises; carpet-like floor pieces overflowing with paper clay petals; giant pods balanced on the floor or suspended from the ceiling; paper pulp paintings.

How she works: “Research first. Then drawings,” she said. “I try to sketch freely and with an open subconscious and then come back and find what’s the potent part of the drawing.” Then she moves into three dimensions: constructing smaller works or assembling parts for installations that will be put together later in museums.



Rebecca Hutchinson installing her piece "Night Bloom" at Racine Art Museum in Racine, Wis. COURTESY OF REBECCA HUTCHINSON

Advice for artists: “No one told me how to mix fiber in with clay,” Hutchinson said. To find your own authentic voice, she said, ask yourself, “What is it you’re bringing to the table that’s just yours? What do you notice about what is passionate or kicking curiosity within you?”

Once you have the answers, go bold. “I always tell my students, ‘Be uncivil,’” she said. “Being civil is important for being together, getting along. But when you’re in the studio, be outrageous.”



Rebecca Hutchinson working in her studio. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

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