

January 18 - March 23, 2008
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COMMON THREAD

Betsy Youngquist



CONTEMPORARY
CRAFT



Light of the Moon

Cathy Rose, *Patience*

Betsy Youngquist, *Humpty Dumpty Day*

EXHIBITION BACKGROUND

Common Thread: Contemporary Craft

Rockford Art Museum invited me to curate an exhibition of fine craft media by bringing together a variety of artists who explore a personal idiom, narrative, or cultural mythology through an eclectic source of materials. The purpose of this exhibition is to provide a place for artists to distinguish themselves as innovators of their media by presenting objects that are fresh and stimulating. In these contemporary artists, a traditional approach to their media is balanced with the awareness of moving forward.

Clay, fiber, metal, paint and mixed media are some of the familiar materials the visitor will be able to view during the exhibition. The objects in *Common Thread* communicate the artist's intent and vision. The broad use of media demonstrates the diversity, energy, and inventiveness in the arena of contemporary craft.

For example, several of the ceramic artists included in the exhibition present innovative and exciting concepts that challenge the traditional view concerning the use of clay. Innovations in where Chris Berti starts, with pre-existing ceramic objects such as brick and clay drain pipes, from which he subtracts until an object is realized.

Delores Fortuna uses wire mesh-like structures that she submerges into a slip that, when dried, the material has shrunk, then fired, so the armature is covered with a veneer of clay that has cracked. This work suggests cage-like structures of containment and, at the same time, a skeletal system emerges.

Another artist, Kurt Brian Webb, starts very traditionally, crating a vessel unto which he carves intricate stories of the human condition and their surroundings. These vessels are strong in form and content. This artist utilizes a narrative that forces the viewer into a visceral response. The vessels are warm and inviting, combined with a critical analysis of the human condition.

Fiber and textiles are represented by Renie Breskin Adams and Chris Roberts-Antieau. Each of these artists has a strong component of storytelling in their vivid and wild creations. Through thousands and thousands of perfectly placed stitches, Renie creates embroideries of playful, and often personal, reflections of quirky whimsical creatures that delight the mind's eye. A fascinating aspect of this exhibition is the multidimensional synthesis of diverse forms, influences and materials that these artists present.

In this group of artists my intent has been to provide a meaningful context for their works of art. As an artist, I am very inspired by the way other artists manipulate and combine their materials. The process in which the work has been made is an underlying theme of *Common Thread*. I am concerned with why and how the works relate to each other, as well as how each of the artists' distinctive image or object transcends through their material into an intellectualized form. The exhibition, *Common Thread: Contemporary Craft*, provides and embraces such an experience.

Lynn Fischer

Associate Professor of Art
Rock Valley College

DEFINITIONS

What is Contemporary Craft?

“The separation of craft from art and design is one of the phenomena of late 20th century Western culture. The consequences of this split have been quite startling. It has led to the separation of ‘having ideas’ from ‘making objects.’ It has also led to the idea that there exists some sort of mental attribute known as ‘creativity’ that precedes or can be divorced from a knowledge of how to make things. This has led to art without craft.”

- Peter Dormer *The Culture of Craft*

“In its broadest sense *craft* refers to the creation of original objects through an artist’s disciplined manipulation of material. Historically craft was identified with producing objects that were necessary to life. Today the word *craft* in America has new connotations. Modern industrialized society eliminates the need to make by hand essentials for living. As a result craft has transcended its traditional role and meaning. The term *craft* now must be defined in the context of a society that focuses on greater efficiency by technological achievement.”

- Paul J. Smith *CRAFT TODAY: Poetry of the Physical*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986

“Craft ... is defined by four simultaneous identities. First, it must be made substantially by hand. This is the primary root of all craft, the wellspring and reference point for everything else in the field. ... Craft is medium-specific: it is always identified with a material and the technologies invented to manipulate it. ... Craft is defined by use. Craft is also defined by its past. Each of the craft disciplines has a multicultural history that is documented mostly by objects, many from societies that have long since disappeared.”

- Bruce Metcalf, “Replacing the Myth of Modernism” *AMERICAN CRAFT*, February/March 1993

“Throughout their long history, crafts have produced useful objects which are later considered fine art. Time has a way of overwhelming the functional values of an object that outlives the men who made and used it, with the power of its own objective presence---that life-invested quality of being that transcends and energizes. When this happens, such objects are forever honored for their own sakes---they are art.”

- Rose Slivka, “The Persistent Object,” *The Crafts of the Modern World*, Horizon Press, New York, 1968

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Artist: Lynn Whipple



Lynn Whipple, *Sweetie Pie*, 2007, mixed media collage with found objects, pencil, and acrylic



Lynn Whipple, *Growing Boys*, 2007, mixed media collage with found objects, pencil, and acrylic

Exhibition: Common Thread | Contemporary Craft

Born and raised in Winter Park, Florida, Lynn shares a warehouse studio with her husband, John, who is also an artist.

Artist Statement

The *Ninny* series began as a playful attempt to alter an old photo with house paint. It has become a 15-year project and has been a vehicle for experimentation ever since its inception. Using found images, I look for little pieces of information that will give me clues on how different people have chosen to go through life. It is a fantastic game to invent my stories based on the visual. Adding collage and found objects further tells my made-up story. I continue to find the absurd things about the individuals in the photos most interesting, compelling and endearing. We are such a glorious and imperfect lot, and this body of work is my comment on that observation.

Discussion Questions:

- Whipple's pieces use odd bits of memorabilia, old books and photographs to create her pieces. What message do you think the artist is trying to tell us by the way she presents all of these mediums together?
- Whipple's style of art is similar to a current craze called scrapbooking. Have you ever created your own scrapbook? What was the purpose of it?

Extension Activity:

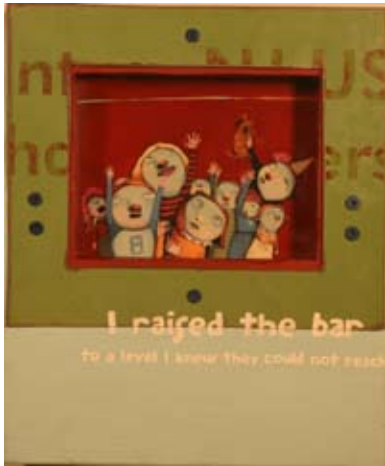
- Have students create an autobiography of their own lives. Have them write about where they were born, who is a part of their family, a favorite childhood memory, etc.
- If possible, have students bring in old photographs that they can incorporate into an art piece that will be in the style of Lynn Whipple. If it is not possible for students to bring in personal pictures, ask them to find old pictures of their towns or cities through research in the library or on the Internet.
- Using various materials such as construction paper, string, yarn, glue, markers, crayons, etc., have students create a "scrapbook page" that tells us something about their lives.
- Students can present their autobiographies to the class. Create a "Who Am I?" bulletin board to display these autobiographies and collages. Work can be displayed at one time, or a different student could be focused on each week.

Illinois State Standards: 1B, 1C, 2.A, 3A, 3B, 3C, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5C, 25.A.2d, 25B, 26B, 27A

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Artist: Beth Bojarski

Exhibition: *Common Thread | Contemporary Craft*



Beth Bojarski, *Raise the Bar*, 2006, acrylic on wood with handcrafted frame



Beth Bojarski, *The Big Wave*, 2007, acrylic on wood

Artist Statement

I started drawing in high school. I drew endless pictures of Michael Jackson for my bedroom walls. Before you judge me... remember, this was when “Thriller” was popular. I haven’t drawn Michael in years. I went on to get a B.F.A. in illustration from Kendall College of Art and Design in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

My medium is oils and acrylics. I apply them to wood surfaces sometimes new, but preferably boards that are weathered and worn. I have used barn doors, cabinets, and slices of tree stumps as my canvas. I have used old boxes, antique brass sprinklers, and rusty metal as my frames. And still other times I have created work that has no framework at all, allowing the painting to be the only thing between viewer and subject.

My ideas are developed as I paint which is why I enjoy the process so much. I do not start with thumbnail sketches. I allow the painting to become what it wants to. I create characters as well as the story as I go along.

I use text in most of my paintings. I like that it draws people in for a closer look. I like that the painting talks to you. I like that it presents a second meaning.

I want my paintings to make you laugh.

I want my paintings to make you feel guilty for laughing.

I want my paintings to stay with you when you leave.

I want my paintings to make you giggle in church when you recall one.

I want you to see the face of your neighbor in my work.

I want you to see reflections of yourself in my work...

For I see myself in each piece and it makes me smile.

I believe that I am the funniest person I know.

Discussion Questions:

- Bojarski's work looks very whimsical. The characters catch your eye, and the words pull you in. Do you feel her message is meant to be serious or ironic?
- The cartoonish figures she creates look familiar to us. Where have you seen images like this before? (Any child familiar with the Lemony Snicket books will see a comparison.)

Extension Activity:

- Discuss puns with your students. Explain puns are jokes that exploit the meanings of a word, or explain there are words that sound alike but have different meanings.
- Have students brainstorm various puns and plays of words (i.e., chocolate mousse, church mouse, grandfather clock, arms race, guerilla war, bookworm, watchdog).
- Have students pick which pun they would like to create a picture of.
- Using a variety of materials (paper, tempera paint, markers, crayons, etc.), have students create a visual representation of their pun.
- Have students present their picture to the class. Display them in the classroom.

Illinois State Standards: 1A, 1B, 2B, 3C, 4A, 4B, 25A, 25B, 2B,

Betsy Youngquist

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Artist: Betsy Youngquist



Betsy Youngquist, *Beast*, 2005, sculptural mosaic



Betsy Youngquist, *Brother*, 2006, sculptural mosaic



Betsy Youngquist, *Momma*, 2004, sculptural mosaic

Exhibition: Light of the Moon

Artist Statement

My mixed media beadwork reflects a fascination with the intersection of humans, animals, and mythology. It is my belief that wisdom can be gained through attending to the living world around us. This work blends personal experience with a thoughtful interest in iconography.

People, animals, and mythological creatures are the central players in my beaded objects. A symbolic narrative is created as human and animal attributes merge. I am drawn to the idea of animals as messengers- as well as the concept that all things are connected and have significance. My interest in beads suggests an ethnographic connection to cultures where the natural and the supernatural converge.

“It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energy of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestations.” - Joseph Campbell, from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

My Process: My beaded objects begin as a form that I embellish with beads and vintage jewelry components using a mosaic process. The basic structure starts as sculpted foam, taxidermy shapes, paper mache decoys, wooden bowling pins and other objects that I modify through the addition of wire, epoxy, and wood. Once the form is completed I adhere beads, vintage jewelry components, coral, abalone, prosthetic human glass eyes, and/or antique doll parts to each object’s surface using glue. After the glue has dried I cover the entire piece with black unsanded tile grout. The excess grout is then removed with a toothbrush and a bucket of water using a “scrub and dip” method. Each piece is finished with the application of an acrylic clear coat.

Betsy Youngquist: Light of the Moon

Artist Statement:

As fourth graders at Welsh Elementary School in Rockford, my classmate Kristin Henard and I co-authored and illustrated a book entitled *The Two Friends*. Xeroxed and stapled, this book tells the story of an eagle and a horse who meet in the wild and become friends. Two of the book's illustrations, both simple line drawings, picture the eagle, Bushy-Tail, riding on the back of the horse, Cherokee. It was a start.

While a fledgling adult artist in 1998, the Illinois Committee for the National Museum of Women in the Arts selected a beaded painting of mine called *Flight of the Zebra* for an exhibition. With a red bird perched on a zebra, the images of Bushy-Tail and Cherokee were back. Still great friends, they had morphed into an explosion of texture and color, and both now sported human feet. Anthropomorphism had taken root. Eight years later I returned to D.C. as a professional artist exhibiting my work at the *Smithsonian Craft Show*. My animal forms had become three-dimensional, and all had human glass eyes.

Always in such a hurry to create enough work to fill my booth for the next show, I seldom take time to stop, breathe, and reflect. As I sit here at the computer, with beads accidentally glued to my pants, I'm further reminded that my life as an artist, and my story as a person, are intertwined with the significance of the animals that cross my path. Animals are as invested in our experience as we are in theirs. Sometimes I think we want to see ourselves in these creatures in order to hear the messages they bring. I know I do.

The show *Light of the Moon* highlights the first decade of my life as a working artist. Whether two-dimensional or sculptural the core of this work continues to explore my own interpretation of contemporary mythology. In the beaded painting entitled *Surfacing*, the white buffalo gently challenges a figure to come out of the darkness and find her heart as the subtle light of the moon looks on. Half of the viewers looking at my three-dimensional fox head *Walden*, interpret him as an entirely different animal, a deer. Taking no offense, I relish the blurring between prey and predator. Lately I've come full circle, as the human heads of my earlier paintings have found their way into my sculptures as antique doll parts. That's always fun—when an unintentional connection becomes obvious.

Betsy Youngquist
October 2007

Discussion Questions:

- Youngquist's pieces often combine animals and mythology. She is greatly interested in the idea of animals as messengers. Looking at her pieces, what do you think her animals are representing?
- The artist's pieces often times tell a story. Her 2-D pieces often look like she has captured a moment frozen in time. Look at one of her 2-D pieces. What do you think happened right before? What happened right after?

Extension Activity:

- Have students research the significance of animals in other cultures and in mythology.
- Have students create their own myth based on animals of their choosing.
- Using air clay, have students sculpt an animal from their myth. Decorate with seed beads.
- Have students present their myths to the class, and tell about the animal they created.

Illinois State Standards: 1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 3C, 4A, 4B, 16A, 18A, 25A, 25B, 26B, 27A, 27B

Additional Web Sites:

- Rockford Art Museum: www.rockfordartmuseum.org
- American Craft Council: www.craftcouncil.org

Learn more about the artists in *Common Thread: Contemporary Craft* and *Betsy Youngquist: Light of the Moon* by visiting their websites

- Renie Breskin Adams: www.reniebee.com/about.htm
- Jenny Mendes: www.jennymendes.com
- Chris Roberts-Antieau: www.chrisroberts-antieau.com
- Cathy Rose: www.cathyrose.com
- Lynn Whipple: www.whippleart.com/Lynn/lynn