In Three Dimensions: Women Sculptors of the '90s (catalog), introduction by Olivia Georgia, essay by curator, Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein, 1996, Snug Harbor Cultural Center's Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art and the Women's Caucus for Art/NYC Chapter Staten Island, New York

In Three Dimensions: Women Sculptors of the '90s

PART II: BEYOND GENDER October 29, 1995 – January 14, 1996 Of course, women sculptors are not limited to themes dealing with gender they are equally engaged with issues facing humanity as a whole: war, racism, violence, destruction of the environment, as well as broad philosophical issues and aesthetic problems of form and space.

THE HUMAN CONDITION The monstrous scale of brutality and destruction in our time (one has only to think of Dachau, Hiroshima, South African apartheid townships, Chernobyl) has led many artists to examine the human condition.

Marion E. Held's Passages and Louise Kramer's Bunker #25 resound with echoes of mass graves and holocausts. Alison Kuby's legless wheeled figure and Nancy Grossman's leather bound head convey a sense of the crippled human soul, while Janet Goldner's decorative steel vessel pierced by a welder's torch with statements and images of figures resembling steel paper dolls, reminds us that "isms" (sexism, racism, etc.) still persist. Susan Grabel puts a human face on homelessness in Once Upon A Time.

Carole Byard, Alison Saar, Joyce Scott, and Winifred Owens-Hart are well known for their strong interpretations of African-American themes. Byard's grim, heavy wall assemblage of ropes and shackles, Flesh and Blood, conjures up images of slave ships, lynchings and chain gangs. The artist has, she says, dedicated this work to "my father, my father's father, my father's father's father; my mother, my mother's mother…and…the millions of other Africans whose sweat and blood helped create this nation."

In assemblages and wood carvings of figures, sometimes enriched with pieces of decorative tin from old ceilings, Saar celebrates the hidden heroism that she discovers in ordinary street people. Scott's richly beaded surfaces (Watermelon Trophy) and Owens-Hart's ceramic ritualistic heads and torsos employ craft techniques to express their themes. Sana Musasama's mushrooming ceramic plant forms refer to and celebrate the Maple Tree Movement, an abolitionist movement of the 1790's embraced by three races: Native Americans, the Dutch, and indentured African servants. Lori Greene's History of the World, a rectangular totem pole-figure, is enriched with elements referring to cultural influences from her own tri-racial experience. They merge "the distant voices of the past with those of the present."

Carol Goebel does a new take on David Smith by welding together machine parts and other ready made metal pieces to create images of broad categories of people. Three-Part Invention symbolizes the kind of human who likes to lead, or run things. Margot Lovejoy, one of many outstanding artists working with video today, uses a multi-screen installation in Anamnesia to convey a powerful message about AIDS.

NATURE Sculptors are responding variously to forms in nature. The internationally renowned sculptor Nancy Graves creates multi-colored bronze assemblages by casting and welding together all kinds of unlikely natural and industrial forms—leaves, pods, delicate tendrils, seaweed, lobster claws, fans, machine parts—in strange lively configurations that support themselves in gravity-defying ways. Influenced by David Smith and Abstract Expressionism, the artist combines her formal concerns with a lifelong interest in biology, archaeology, and anthropology. In Herself Most Drawn, the central image of a sunflower is combined with exuberant welded line drawings of plant forms, behind which a snake seems to be shedding its skin—perhaps a symbol of rebirth or metamorphosis. Originally a painter, Graves is noted for the exceptional use of multi-colored patinas in her work.

Ursula Von Rydingsvard, one of the most powerful sculptors working today, laminates cedar lumber, then carves it and develops the surface with a patina of marks created by a circular grinder. In a recent retrospective at the Storm King Art Center she achieved a thunderous effect, using huge carved logs rolling across the land. Although her works suggest forms in nature, they also refer to early experiences growing up in Poland, on the farm and in refugee camps. Her pieces variously suggest saints and martyrs, and fences or rows of stretchers for victims. Krasavica, a series of immense contiguous bowl-like forms, reminds one of growing things, but also of ceremonial vessels for unknown purposes.

Lisa E. Conway's ceramic Ground Crawler, Elisa D'Arrigo's bud-like forms growing out of a hollow encasement, Heidi Lippman's Lotus, and Cindy Tower's funky assemblage, which includes a joyful figure amidst sunflowers (Madonna Running Through a Field) are three variations on the nature theme. Cynthia Eardley's small ghostly white tableaux, inspired by a trip to Alaska, make us feel the essential kinship between humans and animals. Ivy Parsons builds self-supporting structures out of slate pieces (Bow Down). Christine Rosen's steel and copper Hudson River Series #VII was inspired by the complex forms of ice breaking up on the river, as seen on trips to her upstate studio.

Eva M. Capobianco's Path, an unusual combination of photography and architectural structures, suggests the poignant urban experience of nature seen primarily through windows, blinds and other architectural forms. Patsy Norvell etches lyrical plant forms on screens of glass. In Portable Zen Garden, a kind of hand-held metal carrier of stones, Alena J. Ort makes us feel the calming influence that a stone or rock brings to the human spirit. Heidi Fasnacht's raw, splintery wood structures always embody a dynamic gestural movement, while Carol Hepper's structures frequently remind the viewer of teepees and other functional forms made by early peoples who relate to the land. Monika Kulicka's bags of green chlorophyll dripping into a tub also carry a message about the environment.

ABSTRACT AND NON-OBJECTIVE SCULPTURE A number of sculptors continue to focus primarily on aesthetic form, although overtones of meaning inevitably surface in the work. Thus, for example, Dorothy Gillespie's unfurling of brilliantly painted aluminum ribbons and Judy Pfaff's outsized assemblages of widely disparate materials display an unfettered exuberance of color, pattern and material that refer back to the feminist art movement's legitimization of pattern and decoration. Shirley Koller's Zydeco Rhythms generates the jazzy beat of New Orleans Cajun music. Lynda Benglis's pleated twisted forms imply a variety of states of feeling.

Mia Westerlund Roosen, Jeanne Jafffe, and newcomer Carmel Buckley create abstract sculptures that seem to lie somewhere between the organic and inorganic, with multi-layered references to animal, vegetable and mineral forms. Buckley's sensitive abstract forms have also been correlated with domestic household objects.

On the other hand, Beverly Pepper, Linda Fleming, Jackie Ferrara, Jackie Winsor, and Helene Brandt all work within a more tightly formal mode of abstraction. Pepper's Ternary Form is one of an imposing family of welded and cast works generated by the artist since the 1960s, ranging from dynamic diagonal thrusts to soaring vertical totems. Fleming is best known for her diagonal interplays of wood and steel; Helene Brandt's choreographed linear shapes play games with perspective and defy gravity, starting out upright and ending up almost flat on the floor; Jackie Ferrara's structures, built up incrementally out of stacked units with almost mathematical precision, have the same logic and poetry as architecture; and Kit Yin Snyder constructs architectural forms made of metal screening (Throne). Jackie Winsor has repeatedly imbued her minimalist forms—boxes, spheres—with powerful metaphorical content.

The renowned ceramists Toshiko Takaezu was one of the earliest to take the forms of functional ceramic vases and reinterpret them as pure non-functional abstract sculptures. The aura of Zen serenity emanating from her sculpture is perhaps influenced by her Japanese heritage. Martha Jackson-Jarvis uses broken pieces of ceramic in her three dimensional constructions and installations. Like Takaezu, her works resonate with imagery that relates to her African-American heritage. Sylvia Netzer's room-sized yellow and black installation (Post-Toxic/Neo-Plastic) includes twisted forms that remind one of a world in which genetic engineering has gone berserk or toxic wastes have influenced the gene pool. Barbara Valenta's organic abstract wood carvings are inspired by the forms of boats, musical instruments, and other useful objects (Washboard II). **Emerging artist Drew Shiflett builds eccentric multi-colored structures that have some of the off-beat complexity of post-modern architecture,** and Suzanne Bocanegra's complex wall assemblages are composed of collections of color-related objects.

CONCEPTUAL ART Finally, a group of artists tease the mind with provocative conceptual installations, challenging the viewer to see the world differently.

Margaret Cogswell's Memento Mori was conceived during a year spent working in an abandoned temple in Japan, at a time when forgotten memories of her childhood began to emerge. Deciding to explore the role that memories play in our lives, she was struck by the way the mind blurs or distorts the past and reforms it, despite the presence of photographs, artifacts and documents. Later, the concept grew to include social history.

In her installation, reminiscent of a temple interior, thick, tarred hanging ropes form layers through which blurred images may be dimly seen. Waxed newspapers in different languages

cover the ceiling, their yellowing surfaces filtering the dim light. Half-buried tarred and waxed pots and pans resemble archaeological artifacts. One can not help but think of Hiroshima, and the endless history of cruelty, both personal and political, that humanity must keep clearly in mind, and never forget.

Ellen Driscoll's Raft counterposes a pair of salt (dissolvable) shoes against cast bronze feet suspended from a divining rod—objects implying an absent body. The artist says, "in this piece, I am exploring an inevitable…contradiction…that in moving through life we move closer to death. Through acts of imagination…or in deep concentration, we resist the clock of this process until it overtakes us." In a series of installations, Driscoll has recently used the camera obscura to project images into darkened rooms.

Conceptual artist Janet Zweig, uses the computer, not as a maker of images, but as a thinking and writing tool—a kind of surrogate for the mind. By activating the machine to do some kind of work, she generates formally elegant sculptures. In Mind Over Matter, for example, an unseen computer hidden in the wall generates statements that keep printing out, filling a basket whose gradually increasing weight finally sends it down, and raises a rock tied to the end of a connected pulley on the other side. Zweig lays games with logic and paradox. In this case she programmed three sentences to print out in any possible combination of words: I think, therefore I am. (Descartes) I am what I am. (Popeye) I think I can. (The Little Engine That Could)

The computer, spewing out thousands of combinations, changes the meanings in provocative ways, such as "I think I can think, I think."

Maria Elena Gonzalez builds polished tableaux that activate the viewer. In Audrey, a smooth curved vanity table, backed by a mirror, holds an offering: a plastic pipe, whose bumpy surface invites touch (the artist permits spectators to touch her work). The viewer; bending down to look inside the hollow pipe, discovers that its interior is lined with sharp nails, at the same time catching a glimpse of his or her self in the mirror, in the act of touching that which, perhaps, one should not touch. Thoughts are generated about the paradoxical nature of the human personality.

Lauren Ewing says of her chair pieces climbing the wall: "Furniture, as an 'object of desire,' is a pervasive, often neglected form of mass media. As both image and object, it stores an alternative, intellectual history of material culture. These works are calculated decodings of archetypal furnishings that reveal the political volatility of possessions." Anne Chu juxtaposes strange combinations of materials in her provocative constructions which "explore the banal and sensual aspects of everyday, common objects."

Alice Aycock's installations sometimes resemble phantasmagoric amusement parks of the mind. Inspired by a bewildering variety of sources, such as Mycenean tombs, medieval towers, guillotines, whirling scimitar blades, eighteenth-century scientific texts, wheels, gears, and other forms from the early industrial Revolution, her sculptures can, at times, seem threatening to viewers. Aycock sometimes implies that humanity needs to move beyond the limits of scientific thought, to a new stage of consciousness.

CONCLUSION One may ask, what are the factors uniting all of these extremely varied works? Are they bound by materials, formal approach, content? Obviously not—women artists are not limited by any stereotype, they work in many ways.

The essential element that seems to bind them together is an insistence on honesty and integrity; a search for genuineness, digging deep down into their own experience and coming up with statements that are authentic. The styles vary; the materials and content vary; the search for a new, trendy, avant-garde has disappeared. Instead, whether the work is made of wood, metal, stone, found objects or video, and regardless of whether the approach is traditional, abstract or conceptual, women sculptors are trying to bring new depth of meaning and honest experience back into the world of art.

A number of works that could not be included in the exhibitions because of limitations of space are shown in photographs in a supplementary section of this catalogue. They offer a fuller view of the wide range of work being produced by women sculptors today.

Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein