

**Karen Searle, "Plane & Form at Minnesota Center for Book Arts,"
Hand Papermaking, June issue, 2006**

Plane & Form

In *Plane & Form*, curator Jeff Rathermel chose a fascinating array of artists to sample the range of contemporary handmade paper artworks currently being produced in North America. Works on view in the large gallery of the Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA) included pulp paintings and artist books, sculpture and assemblage, series and installations. The work also represented a diversity of sensibilities to this versatile medium, including artists who work both two- and three-dimensionally in handmade paper. Some of the works were inspired by the fibers themselves, or by natural imagery and forms; other works were conceptually based, questioning social or cultural values.

On entering the gallery, the visitor was confronted by Drew Shiflett's floor piece, *Tongues*, flanked on one side by her *Easel Sculpture #2* and on the other by Jacqueline Mallegni's massive, cocoon-like hanging form, *Breaking Through Barriers*. This somewhat startling introduction served as notice that this was much more than a pretty paper show. Shiflett's works are curious, precariously balanced, architecturally inspired pieces, with layers of hard and soft textures showing through a grid of cut paper strips. They disrupt any preconceptions one might have about handmade paper art. Mallegni's bamboo and wire structure basks in the soft glow emanating from its translucent kozo covering.

The opposite end of the gallery was set off by a fragment of Lori Brink's elegant, 60-piece, labyrinth installation. Its title, *Hippocampus*, refers to the locus of sensory input in the brain. The tactile, 24-foot-long, undulating screen, which set off a pool of salt and a salt-filled vessel, provided a contemplative boundary space. Unfortunately, the viewer could not enter the installation here but could only walk along the perimeter, limiting the interactive potential of the work. In addition, its placement in front of a window distracted somewhat from its majesty.

Within the main exhibition space the works displayed were equally impressive. A conversational grouping of three graceful, elongated, corseted female forms by Julie McLaughlin, melded Victorian propriety with a contemporary fashion and dance sensibility to explore issues of body image. *Menopause*, *Dancing the Grand Illusion*, and *Skin Sister*, created by draping paper "skins" over welded steel, radiated feminine strength and vulnerability.

The exhibition was installed with careful attention to interesting juxtapositions. Mona Waterhouse's *Birch Seeds I* repeats a single image on delicate, translucent waxed sheets. Embedded wire and subtle coloring provide dimension and an organic depiction of a life cycle. Placed next to this meditative work were Nancy Cohen's ritualistic assemblages of glass and paper, *Pocketed* and *Flue*. These sculptures invite a lively interaction with the viewer as partially concealed found objects are revealed through a translucent abaca skin. The rest of the wall was occupied by Grimanesa Amoros's *Drawn Skin*, an extremely tactile series of wrinkled, skin-like drawings on translucent abaca.

Karen Searle