

Narrative, Abstraction, Iteration

Anniversaries enable us to reflect. It is the 10th anniversary for The Bascom in this facility and the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment. What do anniversaries signify? Why are they important to mark? What has been achieved? What do they challenge us to do next? Underlying this exhibition are these two central events—an event that symbolized one step forward in the active voice of women in our country and another event that signifies a commitment to the creative life of the Highlands community. Through The Bascom’s exhibition program we are able to look at the ways in which 19 women are now leading creative lives. Our 19 women, chosen from among many others, embody freedoms inherited from those who fought for our right to vote. They have been able to pursue meaningful careers of their choice and choose where and how they live in no small part because of this anniversary we acknowledge. We have all felt, throughout the planning of this exhibition, that we also want to reflect upon the progress we have yet to make. Too many women throughout the world have few of the rights we now enjoy and too many barriers still exist to full equality for women in our own country. We also celebrate with The Bascom its achievements and look ahead to the quality, caliber, and outreach of its future programs in service to this region.

Often craft is viewed through the lens of function, materiality, process and craftsmanship—all worthy forms of inquiry. With this show I encourage you, as our viewer, to enter a dialogue with these works. You can see how materials inform the meaning of each work and how attention to craftsmanship grounds, or is embodied in, each piece. With my introduction of the ideas of narrative, abstraction and iteration, I want to offer another layer for your engagement.

Exploring narrative you will find somewhat literal storytelling in works such as Jan Williams’ *Granddad’s Appalachia and Letters from Janie*, depicting the joys of her childhood as stories in glass for her grandchildren. Elizabeth Brim’s *Steel Heels*, Cathy Adelman’s choices of books to bind (*Paris France: A Memoir by Gertrude Stein*, for example), and *Penland Portraits* by Ann Hawthorne and Dana Moore are additional examples of storytelling. You will find impressions of narrative and references that enable you to think with the artist about the impact of 9/11 through Georgia Deal’s *QUIET / DISQUIET* and the continuous coming and going of people at Penland through Artie Dixon’s *Hoops and Knoll*, *Penland or Misty Picnic*, *Penland*. Stacey Lane draws from historical jewelry, Beatrix Potter and Dutch still-life painting for an underlying narrative in her work; her selections for this exhibition reference memories--souvenirs from life, special occasions, objects that in life are transitory but in jewelry become permanent. Courtney Martin’s narrative could be the nourishment of food and the social engagement that comes with eating; she says, “As a gardener, cook, mother, and potter, I think a lot about food.” You will also find patterning references to Bogolanfini (West African mudcloth) and mid-century modernist ceramics. Gay Smith’s *Candelabrum* is directly linked to her grandmother; Jeannine Marchand’s work evokes the folds in cloth, a personal family narrative. And, Marie Fornaro uses the quilt format to embed or layer complex social, historical, and political messages that invite you into the work for first viewing through abstract patterning.

Abstraction can be an extension of narrative. Whatever we might call “reality” is interpreted by the maker and then reinterpreted through the eyes and experiences of the viewer. Janet Link reveals the abstract nature of what one might think is a realistic image—in this case, her *migration series* of shadows which are drawings originating from photographs. Artie Dixon’s *Enneptych* and *Pentptych* are examples, for me, of breaking down the complexity of our lived experience into selected gestures or ideas. Diane Kent also takes a keen observation of her natural surroundings and isolates aspects of what

she sees for study; “editing” she calls it. By capturing the evaporation of salt onto glass, Courtney Dodd presents works, *Black Evaporation Study* and *White Evaporation Study*, that are on the one hand quite abstract and at the same time quite literal. Cathy Adelman’s book designs interpret the subjects of her texts; Eleanor Annand creates forms designed to tug the viewer to experience feelings of order, disorder, tension and balance; Ellie Richards’ sculptures invite us to take play seriously—“to play is to contemplate,” she says. The monochromatic, sensual surface of Jeannine Marchand’s sculptures are responding to observed light and shadow and recreating actual curved surfaces of light and shadow. Rachel Meginnes writes that “abstraction has always been a key aspect of my work, perhaps more in theory than in execution.” Focused on an aesthetic rather than narrative interest, her work continues to evolve as she integrates the deconstructed quilt surfaces with her intention towards an abstracted result. Both Stacey Lane’s and Laura Wood’s jewelry speak to abstraction in summary but take different directions. Stacey Lane’s work ties back to its source in a more narrative way; while Laura Wood’s subject, color, seeks its abstraction through the clarity of summation.

Iteration refers to a process of repetition that involves making something, or taking some action, that generates a feedback loop that leads to repeating that action in some way influenced by the feedback received. Laura Wood’s *Spaces Between* brooch series form a perfect example of how acting upon one idea leads directly to another. Eleanor Annand combines multiple forms each responding to the other. Courtney Dodd’s *Little Dipper* series and Gay Smith’s mugs are examples of how many artists in the field of craft work and rework, repeat and evolve functional forms. Gay Smith writes, “I work in series, looking for the perfect form to emerge, then with emulation emerges a riff that finds its way to innovation in new pieces. Perhaps, gazing abstractedly at one’s morning coffee mug will bring a moment of peace or inspiration. Within the bounds of function, the possibilities are limitless.” Diane Kent’s daily walks and persistent journaling create yet another form of pattern in time through repetition. Ellie Richards’ series of playfully reconstructed yardsticks and brooms demonstrate how one idea leads to another and another to form a whole more powerful than the individual parts. Iteration for Rachel Meginnes is what comes from years spent invested in a material and process, observing how each work evolves to a different place from the same initial idea. Elizabeth Brim talks of her years-long commitment to forming snakes, aprons, hats and pillows from steel—each one unique from another. In fact, each artist’s consistent making of art is, in itself, a form of iteration. Throughout their studio practice, there are daily repeated motions, gestures, and marks made; the body embodies the repetition. As with our uniqueness as human beings, our ideas are also working through an iterative process as our lives evolve.

Jean W. McLaughlin, Curator