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PIECING IT TOGETHER

By

Mary Ann Becker

B.F.A., Wichita State University, 1977

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the Graduate
School of the University of Colorado in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Department of Fine Arts, Creative Art

1979

This Thesis for the Master of Fine Arts Degree by


Mary Ann Becker

has been approved for the

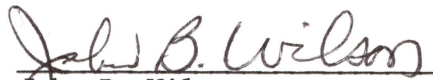
Department of


Fine Arts

by


Thomas J. Potter


Elizabeth A. Woodman


John B. Wilson


Celeste L. Rehm

Date Dec 7, 1979

FORWARD: Me, Myself and I.

I'm an idealist who believes in Fairy Tales. At times I feel like the Ugly Duckling waiting to become a swan. I identify with the passive Sleeping Beauty waiting for Prince Charming to carry her off into the night. I believe that anything is possible if one works ardently for it, saves long enough and doesn't pass the opportunity by when it's staring one straight in the face or knocking lightly at the back door. I hope I never become so disillusioned or frustrated that I fall off my wall like Humpty Dumpty who couldn't be put back together again.

For me feeling and intuition prevails over logic. The work is spurred by the subconscious and forms personal metaphors about myself. The work communicates secrets within me. It reveals my sensibilities and vulnerabilities. The work undresses me and lays me bare. Through the work I discover the self buried within the shell.

All types of communication are very important to me. I feel that a nonverbal visual expression can be communicated, experienced and be given an emotional response without the superficiality of words being attached. Words are a different type of response.

I feel like I've been down under water for a long time and that I'm just bobbing to the surface for a breath of air. I don't know how long I'll be able to keep my head above water before I begin to sink back into the vast black emptiness.

INTRODUCTION: General Attitudes Connoted by the Work.

My work deals with a layering of past and present fragments (pieces). By themselves fragments tend to equate something incomplete or left over. For me fragments have a puzzling mysterious quality. They can serve to inspire the imagination. Fragments leave an opening for a place to go, another faction to escape into an exploration of.

The parts I make are recycled over and over from one piece to the next. In this sense they are a fragment of what came before and what is to follow. The identity of the parts I manipulate are fragmented and are never a complete identifiable whole that remains the Rock of Gibraltar. Because my parts (fragments) constantly make new and different wholes, the fragmentation of the visual is always at work. The same parts (fragments) can create a diverse number of many different wholes at various instances over a period of time. I deal in fragments of pieces and fragments (associations) that are ideas.

The objects I produce are made out of a compelling obsession to create numbers. The idea or ideas of what to do with the individual pieces may come much later. I don't necessarily have an idea for a piece and then execute the parts. That episodic way of manufacturing the parts or the whole from a preconceived game plan and then following it through from beginning to end usually becomes highly boring for me. I like mystery and the flexibility of working in the dark waiting for a revelation. I work intuitively.

Many factors enter into my decision making. When I was a kid my toys usually consisted of parts that were put together and taken apart. Those toys were Lego Building Blocks, Tinker Toys, paper dolls, etc. Each of the toys had at least one factor in common. They all had a certain

amount of nonpermanence and changeability elicited by their component parts.

My process of working assimilates that of a child who has a multiple number of parts of a certain configuration, a set of building blocks, Tinker Toys, etc. with which one must entertain oneself. The approximate sameness of all the parts causes one to examine all possibilities in creating a world that will not totally bore you and remain statically fixed. The parts offer a challenge to seek all the possible solutions that give the parts a new identity with each exploration. There is a constant discovering and inventing as ideas are built up and torn down. A state of temporariness exists that is thrived upon. The hunger for a newness is left unvanquished. My imagination wanders freely playing games with the parts that become a temporary whole. The whole is disposable. The parts, fragments, or pieces are more important. They are stimulus that catalyzes into temporary configurations.

Sometimes, just like when I was a kid playing with the modular objects triggers creative thoughts. At other times it is a vibe from a certain place that communicates to me and suggests options for the parts I have constructed. I have no clear cut and dried answer to explain exactly my reasoning for why I do what I do to create certain situations. There are so many illogically unexplainable variables that make me hot and cold toward the process, the material, the space, color, etc. Many times I do what feels correct by its visual presence and fail to and have no desire to conjure up intellectualizations of visually formal or verbal allegations. Somehow within all the internal chaos a fusion of the logical (structure) and the poetic (feeling) are bonded.

I cannot totally explain or understand how two extremes, the logical, and the poetic, can exist within one person. The existence of the logical

and the poetic side by side creates many contradictions with its conflicts. On my palm, the Head Line, is a configuration that breaks in two directions. It suggests that two worlds are within me, one of logic and one of the poetic. I think the work exemplifies the same characteristics. Part of the pieces in the show are very logical and formalistic in their organization. The other pieces are more spontaneous and intuitively poetic in their placement. The polar opposites of the logical and poetic can exist together. The presence of the two extremes energizes the environment. The thrusting pulls of the opposing forces created by the confrontation of the logical and the poetic cause the viewer to visually bounce about the room.

My thought process is a lot like the decision making of piecing a crazy quilt together. Pieces are cut from the scraps available. The mind sorts through the limitations of colors, sizes of pieces, etc. that have been naturally imposed from the source of what's available. My mind seeks a creative solution not necessarily the conventional. Chance is involved, intuition, something clicks and the mental flow runs new channels of expression. The completed idea is not necessarily a separate object but an energized feeling created from multiples that engage the mind to float and rethink the numerous possibilities in search of new visions for creative escape.

The physicalities that dress the work are a mixture of materials from clay to paper, etc. At times the clay really looks like paper. It's quite playful to the eye. Yet the paper and the clay are quite different. Both materials appear to be immobile to a certain degree. Yet the fired clay is fixed into a permanent mark while paper is biodegradable over a long period of time.

Light acts as a catalyst to personify the intrinsic quality of the

translucency of the clay as a material. Light activates the surface by setting up a mood of cast shadows contrasted by the glowing translucent penetration. This translucent glow creates a type of spirituality in the work. It's reminiscent of the burst of light given by halos.

White sometimes appears to be the colorless color. This is a false notion. White ranges in tone and hue from warm to cold. When separate, three different whites may appear to be the same but when the three are placed side by side the subtle differences advance. I am fascinated by the ability of the eye to detect such slight nuances of white. At this time, these subtle variations of white are upon what my work depends.

White has the stigma of purity and virginity that rides on its coattail. As a color, it reflects light and gives an aura of coolness. White creates a sense of spaciousness and openness. When isolated by itself, white doesn't seem to be overbearing and harsh. It's very nonchalant and almost absent in its presence.

In its basic simplicity, white is stark. Surrounded in a field of primary or secondary colors, white pops forward. But when white is collaged in an environment of white walls, the color white loses the majority of its rigidity and flushes into the neutral surroundings. What emerges is a subdued and non-imposing spirituality.

Throughout my work, white enhances the purity of form and reinforces the crisp linear contour that cuts the air. White is the simplicity that is needed to contrast the complexity of the elements. White, whitewashes and veils the environment. In my work the color, white, acts like a blanket of new fallen snow. White allows the pieces to melt together. It glistens and heightens the abstraction that is present in the work reinforcing the subtle complexity and dependency of the pieces.

The geometry that exists in my work deals with the poetics of space. It describes distances and sets up relationships between points that cause rhythmical patterns to form.

I like making people curious. It's kind of a game I play with myself and the audience. Soft and subtle as if nothing is really there. No earth-shattering domineering force that immediately grabs one just a slow growing sensation that excites tactile and visual examination of the parts. Seeing can be misleading in my work while touching can be a verification of what it really is or is not. Throughout my work, touch can reinforce sight or cause the remiss of what the visual stimuli had transmitted to the brain.

The work has a strange quality of asking to be touched and fondled, yet it wrecks with a "Do Not Trespass" sign. It sends out double messages of touch me, feel me, but don't you dare! That double message can be similar to what is often felt by a person who wants to be close to another person for their physical, intellectual or emotional warmth, but an aloof facade prevents any electricity from being shared between the two people.

The power absorbed by the pieces re-energizes in an installation. The static quality of the individual objects is intensified by numbers and simple variations of logical and poetic transgressions. This causes the eye to flutter. The viewer is caught by a sober stillness in an active silence where mental aberrations can surface and create a peaceful unsettling serenity.

The work contains a precariousness, an openness for changeability and a nebulous tenuous state of affairs. The uncertainty created by the forms, the ability of the forms to be so easily transfixed to an alternative place institutes a feeling of vulnerability and insecurity to the visual

experience. The viewer's feelings of equilibrium is made to be unsettling. It seems as if the scales may tip at any moment.

My work deals with the figurative and literal fragile touchability from a changeable nonpermanent stance. It connotes for me feelings of what I experience in a disassociated transformation.

THE SHOW: "Piecing It Together"; A Conclusion and a Beginning.

The title of my Thesis Exhibition, "Piecing It Together", relates to my process of working and the organization of the parts into an installation. The work conjures up contradictions. The viewer must reach beyond the boundaries of the fragmented elements and fish for a response. A different focus and response may arise from each viewing participant.

"Piecing It Together" has a magical mystery that encapsules it. It takes one into my fragmented world. The pieces talk. A dialectic has been formed between the pieces and the walls of the gallery. The viewer has the opportunity to observe and to participate.

The exhibition propagates a sacrilegious attitude toward the traditional use of clay. The nonprecious material, clay, has been purposefully used for its opaque, translucent and fragile quality. The sensuality of clay as a material is played up. The eye is made uncomfortable by the reality by which it is confronted. An allusion is formed by its ability to look like another material. Clay has been dematerialized into the weightlessness of paper. The paper has lost its flexibility and become rigid in a flowing endlessness of stalemate. The frozen softness forms contradictions of the qualities of the material, clay, as a visual phenomena. One does not expect the objects to be made of clay. Other material associations first enter the mind. The clay has been dematerialized. This attitude in the work is what helps to create its individuality.

The arrangement of the pieces is my response to the existing architectural space of N196. The same installation would not exist exactly this way in another space. The pieces react in the architectural space and are dependent upon its structure.

In general, the pieces in the exhibition speak about horizontal and

vertical extensions of growth. The pieces deal with a fragile floating suspension of frozen order. There is a floating compactness that provokes a contrast of mood which evokes a playful humor and seriousness simultaneously. The rhythms divulged deal with the oppositions of the horizontal and vertical that cause thrust and tension between the pieces in creating a totality. The pieces are manipulated with a toylike quality of displacement. The pieces reach toward the sky. The sky is the limit. The upward growth confronts the viewer with visions of being knee deep, waist high or out of reach.

The layering that evolves from the placement of the pieces distorts and describes one's perceptual vision of space. Perceptions change at various vantage points. At one point space can appear to swallow one up in the crowded complexity of the situation. From another perspective the space obtusely opens up.

The positioning of the pieces has created a layered betrayal of space. The screening process created by the pieces places a veil on reality. This effect has been achieved by placing taller pieces in front of shorter pieces that cause a visual and physical wall. The physical barriers of the pieces create spaces to hide in but never let the viewer out of sight.

Confusion may result from our confrontation with the realities of the situation. At my own height I am seduced by pieces that jut six to eight feet into the air. The sixteen foot ceiling of the room tends to dwarf the life to larger than life-size pieces. The possessiveness of the space creates a conflict with the viewer's relationship with the pieces that confront him individually. Two worlds coexist and feed off of each other for existence.

The show is a maze of detours--metaphorically like my life. The physical frustrations to the participants may be attuned to my own psychological struggle. A maze literally swallows one up and traps one into its designated ritual paths. The dead ends continue leading to an inner discovery of the psychological.

Chiasmal thought surrounds the show. It disrobes logic and creates a playful agitation between that which is and that which could be. The play between symmetry and chiasma (asymmetry) titillates the mind into active thought throughout the work. The contradictions of style and material are accepted because logic does not reign. The seemingly unacceptable is given full reign. Its power forces the viewer to deal with the situation on many realms, that which isn't, that which is and that which could be. It is a challenge to the viewer to mentally participate in a visual change through the mind. The mind searches for its own means of focus from the chaos.

The rhythms, word associations, metaphors, etc., give the simplicity of form, an inner complexity of the emotional thought. The figurative barriers of the mind become a literal physical barrier. The personal metaphors slip back and forth from the reality of the literal to the figuratively imaginative. My confused reality transcribes into the viewer's physical presence. My mental aberrations metamorphize into a reality of the physically absurd. The environment demands a physical and emotional response of the viewer as a participant. The web has consumed you into its power, the maze. The power possesses and dictates the obstacles met and confronted upon the path. The obstacles authorize the detours of the participants. The viewer obliges or destroys.

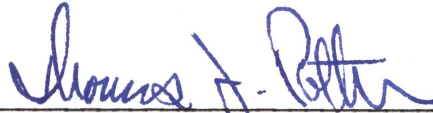
The work demands the consuming involvement of the eye. The experience thus is an adventure, seeking the dilation of the eye in the

observance of the details and intricacies of the parts of the whole.


The fragility of the elements exude a strong linear contour that alludes to a stable world that literally with a touch of the finger could break and crumble at any moment.

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Fine Arts
Mary Ann Becker
has submitted this written thesis
as a supplement to the creative thesis
and ten slides
which are in the permanent possession of the
University of Colorado and recorded with the
Department of Fine Arts

Approved by




Thomas J. Potter



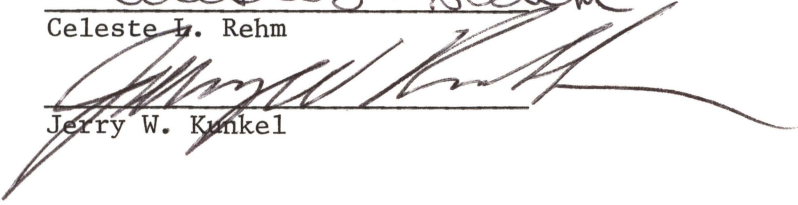
Elizabeth A. Woodman



John B. Wilson



Celeste L. Rehm



Jerry W. Kunkel

