

ANNE KRAUSS

On art, process, and her EMBODIMENTS Exhibit

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Interview by Tatyana Tenenbaum

T.T.: Which piece best represents where you are coming from with your work, and which best represents what you are moving towards? Why?

AK: That's a great question..... the Embodiments collection contains several "series" within the larger body of work that represents, for me, both a return to the earlier roots of my art and a shift to more uncharted territory in regard to subject matter, materials and a technique.

Between Seasons began as an exploration of materials and process and became a metaphor for life transition and the ongoing process of liberating those parts of ourselves we bind up by habit, even when it no longer serves us. So in this respect, Between Seasons, representing transition, contains both "where (I'm) coming from" and what I'm moving towards.

The process of creating Transgeneration was playful and free and in this way represents what I'm moving towards in both content and process. It's a prayer and an acknowledgement... The features are stylized, cartoon-like. The hair contains brushstrokes and there's no attempt to hide the wax that characterizes the hair. And while conceived and designed as a puppet, it became apparent that for the purposes of this show, it needed to be armatured to animate and occupy the space.

T.T.: Take us through puppet construction, start to finish (imagine we've never been in your studio). Which materials do you start with, and how does the subject begin to take shape?

AK: The process is paradoxically both mysterious and concrete.

In contrast to commercial work where you're trying to achieve a specific look or are creating something to fit into a particular context, my personal process begins with an impulse or feeling state that can be set in motion by almost anything; an interesting face, a discarded scrap of fabric or jewelry... The impulse for Friends of the Mosque was set in motion by the confluence of Islamic study and the gift of discarded jewelry by my friend Deborah.

Once the initial impulse takes hold, I most often begin by sculpting. On one

occasion I began with a belly (The Brazilian), on another occasion, I was called to sculpt a breast plate (Giving the Cry), but generally speaking I begin with sculpting the face, hands, or feet in polymer clay while assembling a collection of fabrics and related objects for possible use at a later stage.

When the sculpting is completed I create a body, usually from cloth, at which point I need to know whether the embodiment will be a puppet, armatured figure or doll. I'm then ready for paint, encaustic wax, and whatever else is needed to complete the piece. Stands are assembled simultaneously and there are several pieces happening at once. There are many stages, and oftentimes I'm improvising as I go.

T.T.: How long does it take to complete a work?

AK: In the case of the digital paintings, it can take several hours to a few days to collect and integrate the images. However, in regard to my three dimensional work, it can take anywhere from one month to thirteen years to complete. I've been known to start something and put it away until the time feels right for completion. The head for the figure NOMAD was initially sculpted as an AIDS memorial before it metamorphosed to its present form.

T.T.: In the cosmology of your work, is there a shared universe where these puppets dwell, or do they inhabit separate spaces unto themselves?

AK: For the past several years I've been engaged in the process of renovating a discarded doll house, each room a representation of an aspect of self (House of Psyche). In this respect, there exists a similar relationship with these puppets as they appear to be both part of and separate from me, coming through me as autonomous and yet manipulated at the same time. In this way they're related but otherwise have an existence of their own.

It sounds cliché, but I often feel as if I'm merely the vehicle for these works to emerge.... And my job is to just get out of the way.

T.T.: What is your relationship to narrative in regards to the puppets that you construct?

AK: Well, that's something that seems to be undergoing a shift at this moment in time. Historically, the puppets reveal themselves.. they're not planned, They just happen and I interpret what I can. The rest is up to the viewer.

T.T.: How has your creative practice with fiber/sculpture been shaped by digital media?

AK: I actually think it's the other way around..... most of my digital images have a textile sensibility. The work Cousins, for example, contains a background that's a scanned image of the fabric used in the piece A Natural Predator. I incorporate similar textures and images in all of my work, whether it's digital or sculptural, and like to think of the work as a whole, transcending medium and form.

T.T.: How is your work influenced by other cultures, especially folk art traditions?

AK: I have a strong connection with folk art traditions and, in particular, with Latin American and African culture and art. I can still remember the feeling I had when I realized I was standing next to a sculpture from Africa that contained the hair and teeth of the ancestors. Politics aside, the feeling was palpable- the idea of an integrative creative connection to history and spirit in daily life.

While working in the studio there's often a meditative quality related to the process, be it sculpting or sewing, which evokes feelings of connection to artists and artisans that have lived and worked before me. It's quite profound.

T.T.: Do you ever find a piece evolving in relation to a subject in your psychotherapy practice? How are these two work practices intertwined for you, or not?

AK: I'm not aware of a intentional conscious relationship between the two...but of course there's a relationship. How can there not be?

I'm interested in people and in their stories- the personal and the universal themes that drive or inform our lives. I'm interested in the conditions that create suffering and the ways in which we respond and oftentimes complicate things unnecessarily by creating additional suffering as a response.

Because my studio space and counseling space are separate from but attached to my living space, I can move freely from one space to another, which creates opportunities during the day that may not exist if I had to physically travel to a studio or counseling space. I feel fortunate to be able to do the work I do and in having the physical space that allows for creative thinking throughout the course

of the day.

I'm an optimist and a bit of a romantic so work is always a prayer or an attempt for compassion in difficult situations. I read a lot and take in what's happening in the world, so this naturally finds its way into my work. Art serves as a filter or a vehicle for understanding and processing the human condition.

T.T.: What's next?

AK: (laugh) Oh, I've the usual list of projects to complete and begin. I'll have to wait and see.

Tatyana Tenenbaum is a performance artist, composer, writer and curator living in Brooklyn, New York.