

JILL BEDGOOD

BARNACLES OF EXISTENCE



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

MARCH 7 - JULY 29, 2020

AUSTIN, TEXAS

TRANSCENDENCE THROUGH TRANSIENCE

The palette of Jill Bedgood's *Barnacles of Existence* is almost entirely white. Dozens of objects, most made from chalky cast hydrocal and powdered graphite, are placed on white pedestals or hang on white walls. Many of the sculptures are intimately sized, small enough to hold in one's hands. Soft lighting contributes to a reverential, contemplative setting. Absent from the gallery are video screens, neon signs, live performances, or piped in audio. All told, *Barnacles of Existence* appears deceptively tranquil.

Bedgood is an artist known for meticulous attention to detail and slow-burn subtlety, so it is instructive to pause for a moment before looking closer. She has earned a reputation for understated interventions that honor a historical era, space, or place. She matches her impressive skills of making—through drawing, sculpting or installing—with keen, multilayered observations. Whether in the clever 1999 Texas mythology installations at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (viewed by literally millions of travelers annually), or her 2017 painstaking application of drawing and gold leaf inside the fifty-year old Success Rice Silo in Houston, Bedgood cannily embeds the past into the present.

Barnacles of Existence includes six pedestals, each displaying a unique cast hydrocal book. Four larger relief sculptures hang on four interior walls. At room center stands the giant, cast concrete *Oar: Barnacles* obelisk, with its faux marble base atop a dark pedestal. A large



Jill Bedgood, *Book: Caliper: Worth*, 2019, cast hydrocal, powdered graphite, 7" x 5" x 1"



Jill Bedgood, *Book of Hours: Intervention* (detail), 2013, cast hydrocal, marble dust, graphite; consists of 25 unique cast book-like forms, 7" x 5" x 1.5" each

oar is the central form of both the wall relief, *Barnacles Oar*, and the freestanding *Oar: Barnacles*. Slow-growing arthropods, barnacles affix themselves silently and steadily, becoming difficult to remove. They are alive, possessed of a will to survive. The artist's free-standing oar is encrusted with fragments of jewelry, cutlery, scissors, keys, and hair combs, as if it were an undersea relic. The potential motion of the oar has been frozen, fossilized into Bedgood's nature-culture hybrid obelisk.

On the wall opposite and in visual counterpoint to *Oar: Barnacles* is *Lineage*, a five-foot diameter golden circle, made from a long electrical cord and socket, looking much like a lasso. When Bedgood saw the black electrical cord on the white wall of her father's shop, it struck her as both a sculpture and a line drawing. Some people, Bedgood has noted, bronze baby shoes as a keepsake, but she prefers "to gold leaf my father's extension cord." The gilt cord stands out as the only ready-made object in the exhibition. Its circular shape, like a halo or a sun, quietly signals rebirth or renewal amidst the array of the gallery's other more ghostly objects. By gilding the cord, she silently alludes to artistic forbears like the Art Povera movement (known for creating art from throwaway materials) and offers sly homage to James Lee Byars' *The Halo* (1985, Menil

Collection). The golden shape also calls to mind the ouroboros, the snake that devours its own tail, thus representing infinity. Ancient alchemists revered the ouroboros in their quest to transform base materials into gold and develop an elixir of immortality. Indeed, alchemical transmutation serves as a motif for Bedgood's artistic process of converting base materials into eternal memorials.

Every other sculpture in the gallery reveals objects once removed. Bedgood cast them in either hydrocal (a type of plaster) or concrete, so they bear the ghostly impressions of things that are no longer physically present. Although many of the cast items have a personal connection for Bedgood, that is only a starting point. By carefully selecting what to cast and how, she shifts focus from the personal to the universal. The casting process assures that the original object—the catalyst—is separated from any previous context. They become emblems for reflection. Much of the work in *Barnacles of Existence* stems from the tradition of marble memorials. Her sculptures are modern day memento-mori, deliberately created for the living to reflect on life's transience. Frequently the most quotidian thing—a horseshoe, a button, a key, or an electrical cord—carries the biggest wallop.

While the serene setting and reduced palette deliberately invokes memorials; it also allows Bedgood to remove distractions from the exhibition. The visitor's eye—and fingers, if one could touch these—slows down, to focus on the subtle shapes embedded in the plaster reliefs. A pill bottle cap, a piece of gauze, cotton swab, or syringe are all throwaway objects that may hold infinite value in one context (e.g., when used to ease pain or restore life), but quickly turn to trash. These disposable objects are enshrined on each cover of the twenty-five-volume series, *Book of Hours: Interventions*. As cast objects, they allow one's eye to toggle between the negative and positive impression. Likewise, their purpose metaphorically toggles between use value and aesthetic value, past and present.

By virtue of their process, relief sculptures represent a transition from one phase to another. On one of the pedestals rests the busiest of all the books in the exhibition, *Book: Dusk: Moths.02*. The moth reliefs extend beyond the boundaries of the cover, as if



Jill Bedgood, *Barnacles Oar*, 2020, cast hydrocal & powdered graphite, 42" x 22" x 1.5"



Jill Bedgood, *Book: Crescent Moon*, 2019, cast hydrocal, powdered graphite, gold leaf, acrylic, 7" x 5" x 1"

figuratively breaking through from one stage to another. Moths are nocturnal insects that are compelled to move toward light. For Bedgood, they symbolize transition, the middle point between day and night, a theme also referenced by *Book: Crescent Moon*, with its crescent of golden moon. That moon provides just a sliver (literally) of gold leaf, connecting it back to *Lineage*, alchemy, the Heavens, you-name-it, adding layer upon layer to *Barnacles of Existence*.

In classical psychology, "transitional objects" (baby blankets, stuffed animals) provide comfort to children; they are seen as temporary replacements for the parent-child bond. Adults collect objects that serve a similar connective purpose. Over time, we can amass countless things, sometimes with only the vaguest understanding of why we keep them.

In one sense *Barnacles of Existence* is all about the tenacity of our attachment to things. Their value, Bedgood's exhibition suggests, can be sentimental, psychological, historical, or utilitarian, depending on the timing or context. For example, the books are approximately 5 x 7 inches, the size of a portable journal. The covers feature objects like the moths, a bas-relief caliper, a crescent moon, old-fashioned drop earrings, a

cast of a tiny carved wooden hand and brain, or a surface encrusted with jewelry. Each cover indicates multiple possibilities for its figurative contents. For example, the *Book: Caliper: Worth* (derived from her father's and grandfather's calipers) might contain a treatise on measurement. Alternatively, it raises the question of how we "measure up." How does one measure the memory of a tool's former owner? Is the memory reduced to the single instrument, or does the tool spark countless memories?

The supports for each freestanding book offer another subtle detail to the exhibition. They are propped up on their pedestals by a triangular support the artist created from real handmade paper. One can contrast the fragility of the real paper with the durability of the spectral books. *Book: Crescent Moon* has a trompe l'oeil frayed cover; the bulging pages of *Book: Dust Moths.02* can never be opened. In fact, none of the thirty books in the exhibition can be opened, perhaps a cautionary reminder that memories are not always accessible. *Barnacles of Existence* encourages the visitor to pause, reflect, and consider our relationship to what we hang onto, and what we discard.

Katie Robinson Edwards, Ph.D, is a curator, art historian and author based in Austin, Texas.



Jill Bedgood, *Lineage*, 2020, imitation gold leaf over extension cord, 5' x 5'

Cover Panel: Jill Bedgood, *Book: Barnacles Jewelry.02* (detail), 2020, cast hydrocal & powdered graphite, 7" x 5" x 1"

JILL BEDGOOD

EDUCATION

- 1983 MFA, Mixed Media Sculpture & Art History, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX
1976 BFA, Painting & Art History, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA

ART RESIDENCIES, GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS

- 2021 Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany, 2021
2017 Texas Art 2017, Award, Houston, TX
2013 The Arts Commission Design Awards: Top 100: Community Screen: Code Drawings
2009 Visiting Artist, American Academy in Rome, Italy
2005 Visiting Artist, American Academy in Rome, Italy
2000 Artist Residency & Fellow Rockefeller Foundation Conference Center, Bellagio, Italy
1995 New Forms Regional Initiatives Grant
1994 Virginia Center for the Creative Arts Residency, Sweet Briar, VA
1989 Mid-America Arts Alliance/National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Award in Sculpture
1988 The MacDowell Colony Fellowship / Residency, Peterborough, NH
1988 Art Matters, Inc. Grant, New York, NY

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 *Barnacles of Existence*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
Jill Bedgood, The Gallery at University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, TX
2019 *Cantos of Light*, Rudolph Blume Fine Art/ ArtScan Gallery, Houston, TX
2017 *Soliloquy*, Box13 ArtSpace, Houston, TX
2016 *Soliloquy*, Austin College, Sherman, TX
2015 *Soliloquy*, Fort Worth Community Arts Center, Fort Worth, TX
2014 *Jill Bedgood - Jim Brown - Cathy Cunningham*, Art League Houston, Houston, TX
2013 *Book of Hours: Intervention*, Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, TX
The Conversation: Piecemeal: Steve Wiman & Jill Bedgood, University of Texas at San Antonio Satellite Space, San Antonio, TX
Book of Hours: Intervention, Hanover College, Hanover, IN
2006 *Contagion*, University of Texas-El Paso campus restrooms, El Paso, TX
2002 *At the Edge of Paradise: Cappella*, Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX
2000 *Deadly Sins & Worldly Virtues*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
1996 *Pilgrimage: Transformation*, sculpture on grounds, Austin Museum of Art, TX
Torture/Sacrifice: Flesh/Spirit, Ida Green Gallery, Austin College, Sherman, TX
1994 *DESCENT* collaboration with Beverly Penn, Weber State University Art Department Gallery, Ogden, UT
1991 *Jill Bedgood*, Fox Fine Arts Center, University of TX, El Paso, TX
1990 *Turn the Scale*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
Presence and Place: Four Austin Sculptors, Laguna Gloria Art Museum, Austin, TX

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 *Texas Art 2020*, Assistance League, Houston, TX
2019 *True North*, Heights Boulevard, Houston, Texas
Alterations, Interventions and Other Manipulations, Musical Bridges, San Antonio, TX
2018 *New Texas Art*, Dallas Dealers Association, Craighead Green Gallery, Dallas, TX
Fifth Annual ArtSpace 111 Regional Juried Exhibition, ArtSpace 111, Fort Worth, TX
2017 *Tensile Strength*, Site Specific Installation: *Even Song*, The Silos at Sawyer Yards, Houston, TX
Texas Art 2017, Williams Tower, Houston, TX
Unbound & Reincarnated: Beyond the Boundaries of the Book, Prizer Arts & Letters, Austin, TX
Naissance, Long Center Gallery, Austin, TX
2016 *Craft Texas 2016*, Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, TX
Man's Inhumanity to Man, Holocaust Museum Houston, Houston, TX
2015 *Adjunct*, Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, Salt Lake City, UT
Gently Fried, Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center, Austin, TX
2014 *Texas Sculpture: A Panoramic View*, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX
2013 *transFIGURATION: SOAP*, Canopy, Austin, TX
Let's talk about love, baby: Love Book Project, Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art, Indianapolis, IN
2012 *Western Sequels*, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul, Turkey and National School of Fine Arts, Athens, Greece
Interior, Texas Sculpture Group, Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, TX
2011 *Solid Substance*, G Gallery, Houston, TX
Texas Sculpture Group, Austin-Bergstrom International Airport Gallery, Austin, TX
2010 *Art on the Green*, Kemp Center for the Arts, Wichita Falls, TX
30 -Years: Invitational Reunion Sculpture Exhibition, The Center for Contemporary Art, Abilene, TX
2008 *Texas Chair Project*, Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX
2002 *Dumbo & Beyond*, Davis Gallery, Austin, TX, 2002
Home Sweet Home, Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington, TX
2001 *Sky's the Limit*, Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington, TX
2000 *Sculpture 2000*, Epicenter Gallery, Houston, TX
1998 *Textual Negotiations*, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX
1997 *Abilene Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition*, Abilene, TX
Second Texas Annual, Contemporary Art Center, Fort Worth, TX
1996 *Connemara Nature Conservancy Sculpture Exhibition*, Connemara Conservancy, Dallas, TX
Dreams, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX

- 1995 *Evocative Object*, Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington, TX
h x w x DEPTH, Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, TX
- 1994 *Synesthesia*, San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, TX
Self-Possessed, Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX
- 1993 *In the beginning . . .*, invitational, Art Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont, TX
Texas Biennial, Dallas, TX
Off the Map, Texas Fine Arts Association, Austin, TX
Drawing into the 90s, Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX, traveling
- 1992 *On Death/La Muerte*, Bridge Center for Contemporary Art, El Paso, TX
Experiencias en un Nuevo Orden Mundial, Centro Colombo Americano, Medellin, Colombia
Primarily Paint, Laguna Gloria Art Museum, Austin, TX, traveling
- 1991 *Maps & Madness*, Longwood Arts Gallery, Bronx, NY
Against Inequity: Culture and Politics, 500X Gallery, Dallas, TX
Under Southwestern Skies, Sangre de Cristo Arts Center, Pueblo, CO
- 1990 *Collage*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
Southwest '90, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, NM
- 1989 *Loaded*, Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, TX
Women Artists, Matrix Gallery, Sacramento, CA
- 1988 *Comment*, Nexus Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, GA
Art of the Madonna, Old St. Patrick's Church and Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL
Back to the Future, Lawndale Art & Performance Center, Houston, TX
Exhibit A, AVAA, Dougherty Cultural Arts Center, Austin, TX
- 1987 *New Works*, Laguna Gloria Art Museum, Austin, TX
Objex, Austin Visual Arts Association, Austin, TX
Handmade in Texas, Craft Guild of Dallas, LTV Center, Dallas, TX [Paul Harris, curator]
- 1986 *150 Works by Texas Women Artists*, Women's Caucus for Art, Dallas City Hall, Dallas, TX
Sculpture Symposium, Transco Tower, Houston, TX [Clyde Connell, juror]
Austin 1980, Austin Visual Arts Association, Center Gallery, Austin, TX

PUBLIC ART COMMISSIONS & COLLECTIONS

- 2020 City of Fort Worth, TX: Summer Creek Master Plan & Chisholm Trail Park (in progress)
- 2018 City of Fort Worth, TX: Summer Creek Roundabout: Layers of Identity design
- 2015 City of Austin & Bergstrom-Mueller International Airport: Texas Mythology/Texas Reality: Big Hair & Big Hats, 1995 and re-fabrication, 2015
- 2014 City of Austin: San Jacinto River: Currency
- 2012 City of Austin: Northwest Recreation Center: Community Screen
 Artist Consultant, City of Austin & Graeber Simmons & Cowan Architects: Waller Creek Project

- City of Austin Waller Creek Boathouse: Etched Glass Interior Wall
- 2006 Visiting Artist, Art Department, U-Texas El Paso: Contagion soap
- 2002 Concept Designs, U-Texas Austin: Tower Garden Memorial: evolution
- 1999 Concept Designs, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Memorial, San Antonio, TX
- 1998 City of Austin TX: Convention Center: Texas Botanicals
 City of Austin: Zilker Park Playscape: Conceptual Drawings
- 1995 In collaboration with Steve Wiman, City of Austin: South Austin Senior Citizens Center: Community Quilt Mosaics
- 1990-1991 Phantom Ship Concrete Bas Relief Retaining Wall

PUBLICATIONS / ART IN BOOKS

- The Art of Placemaking: Interpreting Community through Public Art and Urban Design*, by Ronald Lee Fleming, 2007, "Texas Reality Mythology: Big Hair & Hats," pg. 232.
- Stuck at the Airport: The Very Best of Services, Dining and Unexpected Attractions* by Harriet Baskas, "Big Hair and Hats" public art in rest rooms of Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, 2001.
- Mississippi Mud*, drawing "Administer Last Rites on Impact," Issue #38, 1996, page 40.



Jill Bedgood, *Oar: Barnacles*, 2019, cast concrete, marble dust, powdered graphite & steel, 80" x 12" x 15"



Jill Bedgood, *Barnacles of Existence* (gallery view), 2020, Cast concrete, cast hydrocal, marble dust, powdered graphite, steel, imitation gold leaf, extension cord, dimensions variable

WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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Photographs courtesy of Ariel René Jackson and Ali Vanderhider

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Women & Their Work is a visual and performing arts organization located in Austin that serves as a catalyst for new ideas in contemporary art. For over 40 years, Women & Their Work has brought groundbreaking art created by women to Austin with exhibitions, performances and education workshops. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented over 1,900 artists in 326 visual art exhibitions, 155 music, dance and theater events, 16 film festivals, 30 literary readings and spoken word performances, and 715 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, The New York Times, ArtForum, and on National Public

Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 850 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



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Andy Warhol

The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts



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