

JENNIFER ODEM

OPENED GROUND



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

JUNE 28 - AUGUST 4, 2001

AUSTIN, TEXAS

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Jennifer Odem's most recent work explores the interrelationship between human agency and the natural world. By combining organic and industrial materials into self-sufficient structures, she strives to present connections between a forgotten reverence for the land and present day interpretations. While each piece communicates on both a physical and metaphorical level, the intermixing of different cultural elements makes her sculpture resistant to one interpretation. Their divergent associations invite contradictory readings. A quest for individuation connects with wider issues concerning industry and the environment in an ironic yet poignant way, without being purely self-referential.

Over the past ten years, Odem has developed a body of work that utilizes yet challenges formalist sculptural tradition by revealing a human dimension in industrial components. Few, if any, of her pieces possess hard edges. Her lines are crisp without being harsh, distinguished by a calligraphic fluidity of rhythm and movement. The artist states,

there exists an internal logic or dialogue within these works and all parts are essential. The sculptures are created with an understanding that materials and forms have the capacity, through association, to express a concept; and my manipulation of these elements results in a sculptural reconstruction that contemplates the tenuous balance between the spirit and substance in our lives.

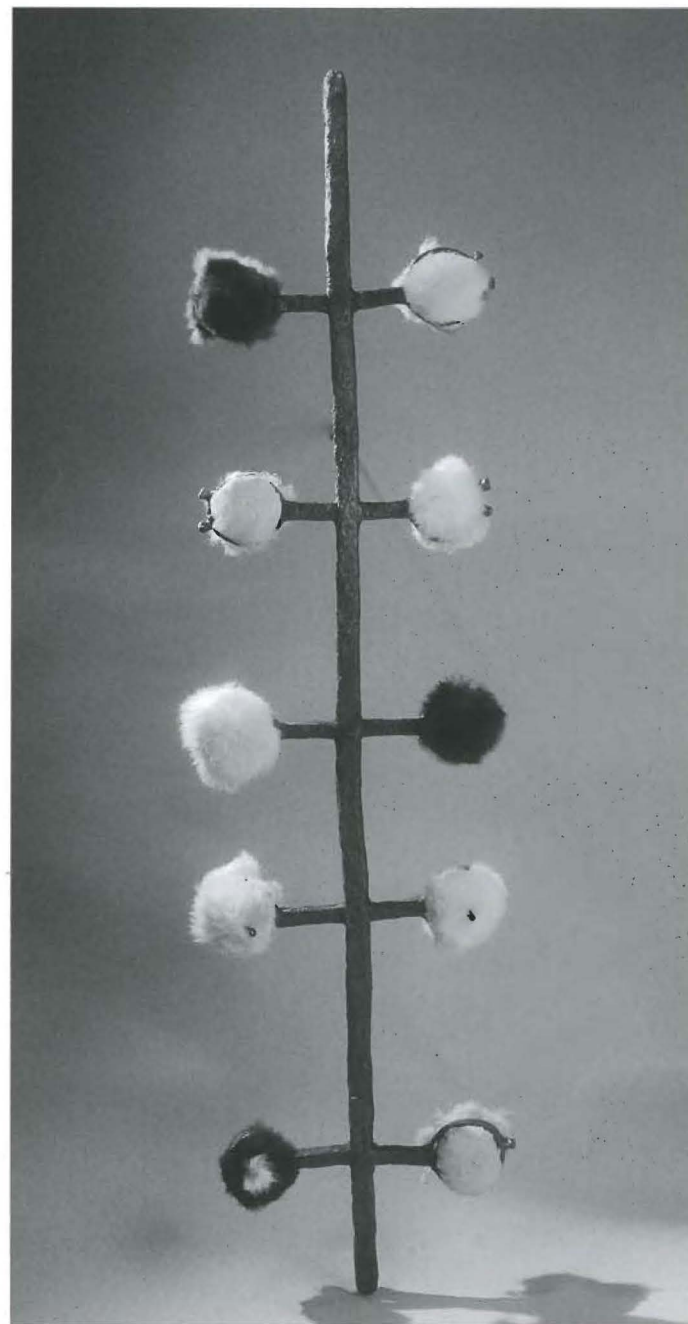
The materials she employs are selected to convey information about an environment and its history:

The idea that an object can resonate with the essence of the place it originates from influences my choice of material. By integrating substances both natural and manufactured, I create forms that reference their material origins while offering allegorical possibilities.

Influenced by psychologist James Hillman's essay *Anima Mundi*, she seeks to animate the object in order to reveal the character or soul of a particular place, real or imagined.

Odem's works are often contradictory in terms of their syntax, encompassing such opposing concepts as utility and futility, engagement and estrangement. She is drawn to both the Zen concept of making without consciousness and the "crazy wisdom" preached by the beat poets—the paradox that subversion breeds new forms and connections. Like the eccentric abstraction of Eva Hesse, her works hover on the cusp of absurdity and implied narrative.

Many of Odem's works involve movement. She often incorporates wheels, vessels, and conduits to convey the idea of mobility on both a physical and psychological level. She particularly emphasizes the ambiguities of human interaction and the rites of passage that define our existence. A recent series of vehicular forms, consisting of carts and other types of transportation, are conceived as metaphors for communication and transmission. In *Presence*, the headstone size slab of plaster resting upon a rocking frame suggests the passage from cradle to grave. While the material basis of these forms—cast hydrastone, cement and steel—alludes to the inflexible foundations of biological and ideological systems, the hybrid character of the structures themselves hint at our potential



She-Bear, 2001.
Cast iron, fur, lace. 55" x 14"

both to transcend our beliefs and to be foiled by them. Many sculptures address the sexualized human body, with the male instinct for penetration and insemination set against female values of containment and sustenance.

The structures in *Opened Ground* (a reference to the Irish poet, Seamus Heaney) evolved from an interest in

creating site-specific works in natural environments. Odem initiates dialogue between natural materials such as soil, salt, stone and minerals, and manufactured materials such as cast metals, decorative fabrics and fashionable furs.

Overall, the work focuses on the idea of the land holding something, be it residue of the past or life in the making. *Terrestrial Matter-Blue*, a series of hollow mounds, created from soft, malleable fabrics transformed into rigid, structural forms comprises a landscape that fills the space of the gallery. Although these objects are installed to both physically and perceptually displace the spectator, the forms and materials of which they are composed invite engagement on both a personal and social level. While these mounds allude to the earth, suggesting ancient burial chambers, they also mimic the shape of a breast or womb. The forms appear resilient and solid on the exterior, covered with earth, salt and protective

fur, but are hollow within. For Odem these shapes communicate the idea of vulnerability as strength: the void, pregnant with the potential to be filled.

The addition of tubes or lingam-like columns at the top of the mounds extends the interior space upward, suggesting the interpenetration of natural and mechanical forms. These demonstrate how the land is vulnerable to external forces that can both vitalize and despoil it. By multiplying these shapes across a field of vision, Odem sets up the power of the breast form against that of the phallus, questioning the ways in which humans relate to the use and abuse of the land. The landscape functions as a metaphor for how differing belief systems affect our experience of regeneration, reproduction and the life cycle. While appearing to uphold the elementary opposites of female=nature, male=culture, she in fact shows that engagement with the environment is

more ambiguous and fluid than such polarities suggest.

A wall piece entitled *She-Bear*, refers to the mythological huntress, Artemis. Fabricated out of iron, fur and lace in the form of a breast-plate, the piece communicates similar ideas of protection, decoration and defense. These themes are also projected in the male equivalent *Tribal*, where a cluster of bullet-like phalluses are rendered ridiculous through delicate adornment.

Through strategies of inversion and the interaction of opposing values, Odem explores the land as an environment that is separate from culture but also receptive to human intervention and appropriation. Despite appearing contradictory, even absurd, her works are ultimately respectful of systems, relationships and locations. Moreover, by animating her sculptures in a highly personal way, Odem seeks to reconcile the invariants of existence with its uncertainties.

Alison Smith
Senior Program Curator
Tate Gallery, London
May 2001



Presence, 2000.
Cast hydrastone, copper. 9" x 19" x 11-1/2"

JENNIFER ODEM

Resides in Austin, Texas

EDUCATION

- 1989 M.F.A. in Sculpture, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL
- 1987 B.F.A. in Sculpture, University of Louisiana, Lafayette, LA

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2001 **Jennifer Odem: Opened Ground,** Women & Their Work Gallery, Austin, TX
- 2000 **Jennifer Odem: Sculpture and Drawings,** Austin College, Sherman, TX
- 1999 **Jennifer Odem: Cart Variations,** Proposition Gallery, Belfast, Northern Ireland
- 1998 **Jennifer Odem: Recent Works,** Northern Highlands University Gallery, Las Vegas, NM

Jennifer Odem: Site-Specific Sculpture, The Center for Land Use Interpretation, Salt Flats, UT
- 1997 **Jennifer Odem: New Sculpture,** Gasworks Gallery, Vaux Hall, London, England

Recent Drawings by Jennifer Odem, Lang Gallery, Vienna, Austria
- 1996 **Seven Pearls,** Dean Clough Art Galleries, Halifax, England
- 1993 **Jennifer Odem: Sculpture,** Perkinson Gallery, Millikin University, Decatur, IL
- 1992 **Confluence, Drawing and Sculpture,** Lubbock or Leave It Gallery, Austin, TX

Watermark, Drawing and Sculpture, Artists' Alliance, Lafayette, LA
- 1991 **Jennifer Odem: Sculpture,** Art and Design Gallery, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITION

- 2001 Southwest Texas State University Gallery, San Marcos TX
- 2000 **Houston Sculpture 2000,** Continental Bldg., Houston, TX
- 1999 **Sculpture Garden Exhibition,** Irving Arts Center, Irving, TX
- 1998 **Artworks '98 Sculpture Exhibition,** Aquarena Springs, San Marcos, TX
- 1997 **Inversion,** Collaborative Exhibition, Chiltern Sculpture Trail and Gallery, Oxford, England

- 1996 **Louisiana Sculpture Invitational,** Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, LA

Sculpture on Exhibit, Tyrone Guthrie Center Sculpture Trail, County Monahan, Ireland
- 1995 **Resident Artists Show,** Fire Station Artists Studios, Buckingham Street, Dublin, Ireland

Four Sculptors, St. Louis Design Center, St. Louis, MO

Sculpture on Exhibit, Human Arts Gallery, Atlanta, GA
- 1994 **Self Possessed,** Laguna Gloria Art Museum, Austin, TX, Catalogue with touring exhibition through 1996.

Reuse/Recycle, Lournier Sculpture Park, St. Louis, MO

History and Memory: Pictures and Objects, Foster Gallery, Eau Claire, WI

Aurora, Outdoor Public Installation, Downtown Austin, Austin, TX
- 1993 **Navy Pier Show,** Chicago International Art Exposition, Chicago, IL

12 No Trump, Peter Miller Gallery, Chicago, IL

RESIDENCIES AND AWARDS

- 2000 Presidential Award for Excellence in Scholarly/Creative Achievements 2000, College of Fine Arts and Communication, Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, TX
- 1999 Artist in Residence, Flaxart Studios, Belfast, Northern Ireland. May-July
- 1998 Artist in Residence, The Center for Land Use Interpretation, Wendover, UT. May-July
- 1997 Artist in Residence, Gasworks Studios, London, England. May-August

Artist in Residence, Cill Rialaig Project, Ballinskelligs, County Kerry, Ireland. April-May
- 1996 Artist in Residence, Dean Clough Art Galleries, Halifax, England

Visiting Artist, Tyrone Guthrie Center, Annamckerrig Ireland. April
- 1995 Artist in Residence, Firestation Artists Studios, Dublin, Ireland. October-January

REVIEWS

- "Puzzlin' Evidence," by Charles Labelle, *Frieze Magazine*. March 2001
- "Sculpting Cart Art," by Ian Hill, *Newsletter-Arts*, Belfast, Northern Ireland. July 1999
- "Into the Two Worlds of Irish Art," by Vincent Jamison, *Sunday Business Post*, Dublin, Ireland. December, 1995
- "Landscape of Diversity" by Robert Duffy, *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, St. Louis, MO. April, 1995
- "Three Time's the Charm For In Form Arts group," by Alexandra Bellos, *River Front Times*, St. Louis, MO. November 20, 1991
- "In Form Three, A Gem For St. Louis Art Community," by Patricia Kemeney Macias, *West End Word*, St. Louis, MO. November 7, 1991
- "Streetwise," by Mark Hinson, *Tallahassee Democrat*, Tallahassee, FL. May 7, 1987
- "Arts," by Betty Rubinstein, *Tallahassee Democrat*, Tallahassee, FL. October 9, 1987
- "Sculpture: A Future," *The Daily Advertiser Newspaper*, Lafayette, LA. May 8, 1987
- "Best of Acadiana," *The Times of Acadiana Newspaper*, Lafayette, Louisiana. May 27, 1987



Cover Panel: *Terrestrial Matter-Blue*, 2001. Marble dust, fur, lead, earth. 31" x 21-1/2" x 21-1/2"
This Panel: *Fertile Print-Red*, 2001. Cast hydrostone, red iron oxide, casters. 27" x 23" x 19"
Back Panel: *Ground Swell*, 2001. Cast hydrostone, salt. 24" x 26" x 26"



W O M E N & T H E I R W O R K

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This publication has been made possible through the generous support of the the Webber Family Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Special thanks to BAH! Design.

Now celebrating its 23rd anniversary, Women & Their Work presents over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, 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 1,634 artists in 202 visual art exhibitions, 100 music, dance, and theater events, 12 film festivals, 19 literary readings, and 214 workshops in programming that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *ArtForum* and 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 5,000 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.



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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