

SARAH NIX GINN

SANCTUARY



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

FEBRUARY 21 - MARCH 30, 2002

AUSTIN, TEXAS

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"My compositions are all girls, and instead of worded names, have numbers as their identification." Sarah Nix Ginn

Seemingly fragile, but actually as hardy and resilient as the "female types" they embody as their role models, Sarah Nix Ginn's art arises from the most basic elements. The artist's simple, ubiquitous materials are seemingly straight from a high school home economics course, circa 1955. There's nothing radical about these components of everyday domesticity. Indeed, their formal ingredients, patterns from *Butterick*, *Simplicity* or *McCall's* and simple straight pins, can be found in any dressmaker's shop.

"I save everything," the artist volunteers. Ginn often receives her paper patterns from other women and the patterns come imbued with their previous owners' family history. For pins, she prefers the plainest, #17 silk pins; however, recently those with vibrantly hued heads have also been making an appearance. Interspersed with the patterns and pins, Ginn adds other touches, frequently using homemade stamps, nail polish or acrylic paint to infuse additional color in her work. From these non-traditional art materials, Ginn wrests a surprising variety of effect. The resulting three-dimensional creations, evidenced in drawings and sculpture, manifest a pervasive and persuasive femaleness. Indeed, Ginn is a master at confidently asserting a wide range of feminine personality and expression. From elegant flirtatiousness to a stolid matronliness, gender is never in doubt.

Ginn's art is powered by memory and she, too, is a memory maker. A high school teacher who returned to college to collect her MFA (University of Houston, 2000), she adroitly straddles the world of domesticity (housewife, mother), working woman

(currently a kindergarten teacher in an inner-city school) and professional artist.

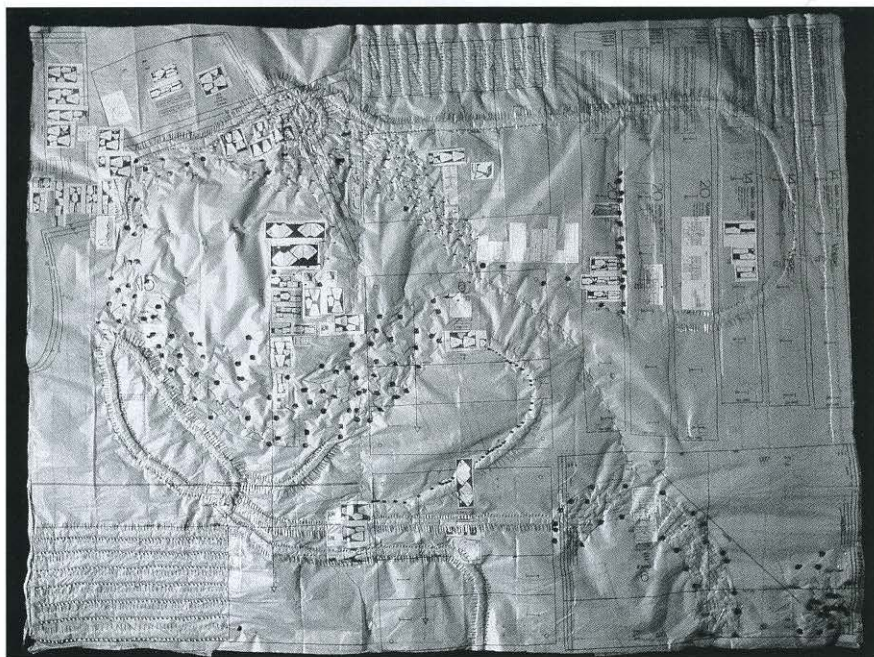
For a fuller understanding of Ginn's delicate, almost ethereal drawings and sculpture, one must start with her childhood, particularly her memory of her mother. The artist recounts the recurring image of her mother, bending over the sewing machine or confidently thrusting pins into fabric and pattern, first in her native Puerto Rico, later in a commercial shop in Key West, where she made sportswear garments for the tourist industry.

As a young girl, Ginn was perhaps most struck by her after school visits to her mother's shop in Florida. The elder Ginn worked with many female colleagues in perhaps one of the few factory jobs where women predominated. Ginn vividly remembers "the rows of sewing machines with women taking care of them, and the repetitive actions of these unsung people." The artist also perceives similarities between the typical women's work in the sewing factory of her mother's day and her own

life as a studio artist with work table, intense concentration and the physically repetitive motion of laying pins into tissue to form a finished product. "Even though I never wanted to admit it before, my work does have a feminist view," Ginn explains. She has written about "rebellious against the dictated authoritative voice found on the pattern paper." While embracing the dialogue of feminism, like the silent women her art honors, Ginn's message is subtle and compelling.

A breakthrough graduate school class at the University of Houston with famed Texas-based artist Luis Jimenez sparked, then ignited Ginn's work as a sculptor; previously she had only painted. "I gave myself permission to make sculpture and to create art for myself, not to please others" she remembers about her epiphany in 1998. Since that time, Ginn has uniquely and successfully begun to articulate her vision. Her work today is wholly her own: a fresh, captivating and original voice.

176 Drawing, 2001.
Mixed media. 38-1/2" x 51"



Nine of the works showcased in *Sanctuary* beautifully highlight and elucidate the essence and goals of Ginn's art making. Included are five sculptures, three drawings and a quilt drawing.

The exhibition title is curious but somehow perfectly appropriate. *Sanctuary* riffs on notions of domestic order and the ideal of home as a retreat and a kind of inner sanctum. There are also religious overtones implied, i.e. the sanctuary as the holiest area in a church, a space where only priests or acolytes enter. These associations are not accidental: Ginn is a practicing Catholic, raised in the faith since her birth and childhood in Puerto Rico.

The most iconic works in this show are the sculptures, which really do transform themselves into models of the feminine mystique. Spend enough time with these works in the art space uninterrupted by others, and you'll feel like you're not alone, but surrounded by the presence of the gentlewomen Ginn invokes.

The sculptures in *Sanctuary* share the same materials: a gossamer thin tissue skin (from the pattern paper that forms them) pierced by assertive rows of pins that confidently range across their surfaces. Shaped like simplified columns and vessels, they possess the assurance of self-possessed women. These sculptures initially suggest garments, stand-ins for the person who would wear them, then ultimately transform into actual individuals.

The bustier shaped *2061*, the femme fatale of the group, embodies a flirtatious siren, a Catherine Zeta-Jones type of beauty, curvy and svelte, her sheath decorated with riotous stamped roses. In contrast, *7438* is a prim and stoic dowager, donning unadorned cream-colored tissue and an upright posture. *2002* affects a mod sensibility, with undulating bands of char-treuse and fleshy pink acrylic, interrupted by pins with bright flower-form heads,

which have been meticulously hand painted by the artist. Then there's the serene elegance of *3520*, the most graceful of all, an Audrey Hepburn/Jackie O. type of woman. *3520* wears a restrained palette, adorned with golden brown feathers and stamped areas of black. *7399* offers a fashion testimonial to minimalism, clean lines and an Empire waist, a gown for Gwyneth or Cameron.

The artist's drawings are represented in *Sanctuary* by *170*, *178* and *312721*. With rhythmic arrangements of neat, orderly pins marching across folds of paper, they're gathered and plumped to form mountain ranges. There's an aspect of an aerial map in these three-dimensional works, which like the sculptures are built up of successive layers of dress-making paper. Architectural models are also implied in the tidy rectilinear rows of pins, which butt against the undulating landscape-like shapes. *170*, *178* and *312721* ultimately manifest the clean rigor and neat structure of needlework, particularly found in tailoring or garment making. However, Ginn reverses the expected process; she makes the unseen visible and tangible, celebrating the skill of the often-anonymous hand of the dressmaker. For Ginn, the beguiling repetition of making these drawings, which flirt between "the delicate and dangerous...the beautiful and prickly... places me in a meditative state."

DRWG - Quilt, a breakthrough piece from 2000, weaves the past with the present, honoring unknown heroines whose lives seem to vanish from history's memory. A discarded journal, which the artist found casually tossed in a ditch near her house was the catalyst for creating this piece, Ginn's first quilt. This notebook of a Texas women's society, dating from the 1920s through the 1940s, included meticulous recorded entries of the long forgotten names and events that possess



7399, 2000.
Mixed media. 23"x11"x11"

an elegiac quality, and that Ginn preserves in her art. She lovingly places the pages of handwritten text behind translucent sheets of plain pattern paper, and then surrounds these rectangular elements with orderly rows of pins and thicker areas of dress-making paper to shape the completed quilt. The exquisite cursive of a forgotten scribe peeks through the delicate tissue paper, a metaphor for the process of memory. We glimpse through Ginn's veil of tissue the beautifully measured columns from this lost ledger that record with precision, names and dates from distant decades. One of Ginn's most nostalgic pieces, *DRWG - Quilt*, nonetheless moves beyond sentiment to honor the buoyant life forces of the women it memorializes.

Catherine D. Anspou
Houston, Texas
December 2001

SARAH NIX GINN

Resides in Houston, TX.

EDUCATION

- 2000 M.F.A., Painting, University of Houston, Houston, TX.
1982 B.F.A., Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX.

SOLO EXHIBITS

- 2002 **Sanctuary**, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX.
2001 **Recent Work**, Galveston Art Center, Galveston, TX.
BREATHE, Diverse Works, Subspace, Houston, TX.
2000 **Paseos**, Small Projects Gallery, University of Houston, Houston, TX.
1999 **Sarah Nix Ginn – New Work**, Purse Building, Houston, TX.

SELECTED EXHIBITS

- 2001 **Positively Negative, Photograms from Houston Artists**, Negative Space Gallery, Houston, TX.
Fashionistas, Poissant Gallery, Houston, TX.
RCA SECRET, Royal College of Art, Kensington Gore, London
Cow Parade Houston, "Simplicow," billboard downtown Houston on Franklin and Louisiana Streets, Houston, TX.
Steel Grrrls, Art League of Houston, Houston, TX.
Open Show, Art League of Houston, Houston, TX.
Flight, Diverse Works 2001 Auction, The Mercury Room, Houston, TX.
Five by Seven by X, Texas Fine Arts Association, Austin, TX.
New Prints from Texas, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX.
Assistance League of Houston, Celebrates Texas Art 2001, Williams Tower Gallery, Houston, TX.
2000 **Fresh Mix**, Community Artist's Collective, Houston, TX.
Junior's Choice Exhibition, Women & Their Work Gallery, Austin, TX.
Sextablow, Works on Metals, Red Bud Gallery, Houston, TX.
13th Annual Dia de los Muertos, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX.

RCA SECRET Gulbenkian Galleries, Royal College of Art, Kensington Gore, London

STOMP AROUND, Nancy Littlejohn Fine Art, Houston, TX.

Body:Text, Moss-Thorns Gallery of Art, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS.

Cutting pattern/cutting edge, Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington, TX.

The Big Show, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX.

Exhibitions, 2000
Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, Houston, TX.

Revelation, Texas 2000, ARA Bldg., University of Houston, Houston, TX.

Frame, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX.

Limp, Bruce Mauldin MFA Gallery, Houston, TX.

UH Sculpture Garden, University of Houston, Houston, TX.

Master of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition 2000, Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, Houston, TX.

Visual Poetry, etc., Artemisia Gallery, Vaxjo, Sweden

Graduating 2000, Diverse Works, Houston, TX.

AREA Show, Vine Street Studios, Houston, TX.

Assistance League of Houston Celebrates Texas Art 2000, The Williams Tower, Houston, TX.

1999 **Open 24 Hours**, Studio 107, Austin, TX.

12th Annual Dia de los Muertos, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX.

Absolut Secret, Gulbenkian Galleries, Royal College of Art, Kensington Gore, London, England

Who's on Fourth?, Graduate Painting Annex, University of Houston, Houston, TX.

SWA National Multimedia 1999, Walker Educational Center, Huntsville, TX.

New Texas Talent V, Craighead-Green Gallery, Dallas, TX.

The Big Show, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX.

1998 **11th Annual Dia de los Muertos**, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX.

Dia de los Muertos Altar Exhibit, Casa Ramirez, Houston, TX.

5 Painters–5 Installations, Fine Arts Bldg., University of Houston, Houston, TX.

The Big Show, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX.

Image is Everything, Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, University of Houston, Houston, TX.

Go on and get you some, Lunatex Gallery, Houston, TX.

1997 **Absolut Secret**, Henry Moore Gallery, Royal College of Art, Kensington Gore, London, England

Texas Graduate Exhibition, Gaddis Geeslin Gallery, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX.

Luscious Show, The Firehouse Gallery, Houston, TX.

Small Projects on the Road, Off-Ice Gallery, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada

AWARDS

- 2000 Third Place Winner, Assistance League of Houston, **Celebrates Texas Art 2001**, Williams Tower Gallery, Houston, TX. The University of Houston, Houston, TX.
Second Place Winner, **Houston Area Exhibition 2000–100 Mile Range Round Up Exhibit**, Blaffer Gallery, Houston, TX

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

COW PARADE, HOUSTON, Tom Craughwell and Vicki Bomke Thompson, *Workman Publishing Company Inc., New York, 2001*

Fashion Forward, Which came first – the artist or the designer? By Kelly Klaasmeyer, *Houston Press, November, Vol. 13, Number 44*

houston.citysearch.com > arts Sarah Nix Ginn: Breathe, Review of Breathe exhibit at Diverse Works, Houston, TX. by Catherine D. Ansporn

Canvas, Visual Life in *Texas Magazine, volume 3, no.3*, by Rainey Knudson, Houston, TX. 2000

Houston Sculpture 2000 Spring Catalogue, Arts Around Town, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX.

Houston Chronicle This Week, Houston, Texas, City of Art, by Carol E. Vaughn, May 31, 2000

Houston Press, Houston, Texas, Art: The Third Dimension, by Kelly Klaasmeyer, June, 7, 2000

Houston Chronicle, Houston, Texas, Emotion, hidden issues come forward in shows, by Patricia Johnson, June 6, 2000



Cover Panel: 2661, 2001. Mixed media. 21-1/2" x 12"x11"
This Panel: 3526, 2001. Mixed media. 26-3/4" x 10"x 9"
Back Panel: 2662, 2001. Mixed media. 23"x11" x 7-1/2"



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Now celebrating its 24th 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 1,653 artists in 206 visual art exhibitions, 100 music, dance, and theater events, 12 film festivals, 19 literary readings, and 222 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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