

## QUILTS: Continuity & Change

### IN REVIEW

Clinton, New Jersey

Reviewed by Jacqueline Ruyak

#### Knitted Knotted Netted Hunterdon Museum

*Knitted Knotted Netted* at the Hunterdon Art Museum showcased 12 artists who use the techniques of knitting, knotting, and netting in their work (October 11, 2009-January 24, 2010). The artists shown reflect a growing interest among contemporary artists worldwide in exploring traditional techniques once considered domestic or practical. Curator Hildreth York focused on three techniques that all require looping or interfacing thread, unlike weaving and braiding, where threads interlace but need not loop through each other.

All three techniques have ancient lineages. Knotting and netting likely date back to the Paleolithic era, when humans began using animal gut or plant fibers to make clothing or hunting or fishing implements. Though a later innovation, two-needle knitting was being done in medieval times, and single-needle much earlier.

Using animal gut, plant fibers, metal, and synthetic threads, or plain old wool, the artists in the show showed an engaging diversity in approach and execution. To let their individuality "speak," York chose several works by each artist and grouped all the works by each



artist together, offering an effective introduction both to the makers and their work.

Some work, like Ruth Marshall's life-sized animal hides and skins knitted in basic stockinette stitch (think sweaters and socks) from dyed wool yarn, seemed quite straightforward. Stretched on bamboo sticks, of the kind used to mount animals killed in the wild, *Ivey the Snow Leopard* replicates, spot by spot, the pelt of a snow leopard. Each "skin" in the *Coral Snakes* series mimics the dazzling variety exhibited by these reptiles, and each is tagged to authenticate it. But Marshall, who worked for years as an exhibit sculptor and fabricator at the Bronx Zoo, uses her fabulous fake skins to deliver a witty and dead-on message

NORMA MINKOWITZ *Chrysalis*  
Wood, fiber, paint, resin,  
58" x 23" x 1", 2004.  
Photo: Tom Grotta.  
Courtesy of browngrotta arts.

about animal conservation.

Ann Coddington Rast's simple sculptural forms of knotted net played on ideas of being and emptiness, light and dark, and absence and desire. Carol Westfall's beautiful indigo panels called *Knit, Knot, Net*, provided a direct interpretation of technique, while her densely packed balls of weaver's knots, from a series called *This Crowded Planet*, were bewitchingly enigmatic. Were they a call for solidarity? Or for help?

Abigail Doan's exuberant bundles made variously, from crocheted, twined, hand-spun, and recycled fiber; street finds; vintage thread; silk cocoons; wool roving; dried vegetation; knotted cotton; balloons; and paper, reflect the artist's environmental concerns, not to mention a serious predilection for recycling. Her work is somehow comforting and totally memorable.

Karen Ciaramella showed a different, but no less intense, energy in her work using white wool, a material she associates with purity and spirituality. Ciaramella explores the philosophical tenets of non-duality and enlightenment. Her *Divine Goddess*, an ambiguous womb-like standing figure, trailing tendrils of knotted wool onto the floor, had an uncanny physical power.

I had often seen images of Ed Bing Lee's work, mainly of



CAROL WESTFALL *This Crowded Planet* (one of five works in a series)  
Mixed media, compressed weaver's knots, approx. 5" diameter, 2002-2006.  
Photo: D. James Dee.

RIGHT: ED BING LEE *Mocha Swirl* Waxed linen, knotted, double half-hitches,  
7" x 6" x 6", 2009. Photo: Ken Yanoviak, Courtesy Snyderman-Works Galleries.

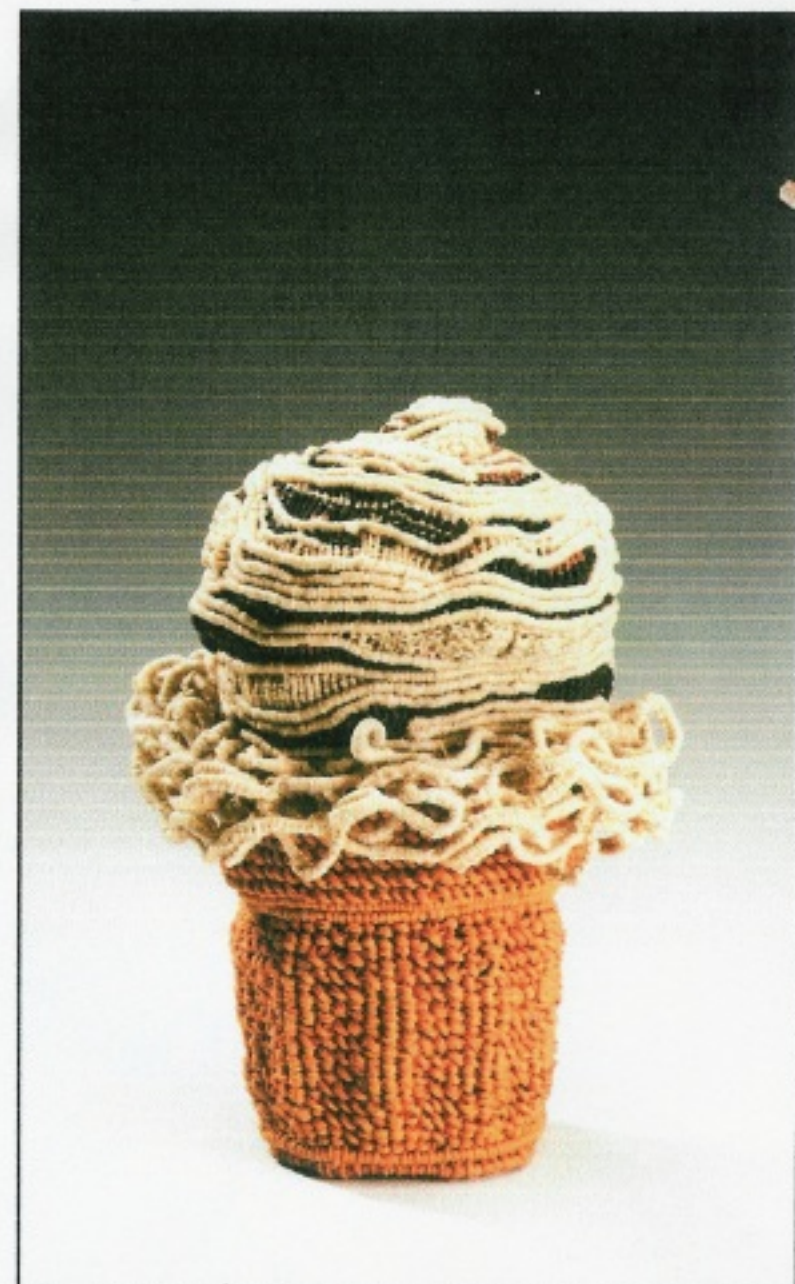
American food from his *Delectables* series. This was my first chance for an in-person look; it did not disappoint. Lee uses knots, gazillions of them, in making his small sculptures of cotton, waxed linen, synthetic raffia, and ribbons. The work runs the gamut from the clever, brash fun of *Pop Corny 1*, an iconic rendering of a tub of popcorn, to the exquisite beauty of the *Earth Crust* miniatures, representing slices of geological formations. The technique is what many Americans know as macramé, but Lee explodes all notions of what knotting is about.

Leslie Pontz used crocheted yarn and metal, silk organza, and rusted industrial objects to create abstract, at times fantastic, botanical forms, often of cacti or pods suspended from chains. Pontz finds her

inspiration in the "hard shapes, soft sands, and prickly textures" of the desert; her work has wonderful tactile appeal.

*Shadows* play a part in Pontz's work and in that of Norma Minkowitz, who states: "I seek mystery in the shadows of the work. The netting's effect is to blur the shape within." Minkowitz, who combines crochet and netting, is a master of shadows and light, darkness and transparency. *Chrysalis*, a large sculptural piece, had a profoundly brooding beauty, enhanced by the same subtle coloristic and textural touches found in her other pieces. Minkowitz exemplified the high quality of execution that characterized all of the work in the show.

A pioneer in the use of animal gut and sinew, Pat



Hickman has recently experimented with "translating" netting into other mediums. Her cast bronze *Ordinance* was dark with latent menace.

Also on view were pieces by Japanese artists Hisako Sekijima, Kazue Honma, and Noriko Takamiya, veterans of the sculptural-basketry movement. Their organically geometric sculptures of knotted natural fiber somehow made a fitting coda to another excellent exhibition at the Hunterdon Art Museum. This was the third show I have seen there. All have been consistently outstanding.

—Jacqueline Ruyak is a writer living in Wassergass, Pennsylvania.

