LINES IN SPACE

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by

Lisa R. Arenstein
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Thesis written by
Lisa R. Arenstein
B.S. University of Cincinnati, 2001
M.F.A., Kent State University, 2013

Approved by

___________________________________________, Advisor
Janice Lessman-Moss

____________________________________________, Director, School of Art
Christine Havice

____________________________________________, Dean, College of the Arts
John R. Crawford
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Special thanks go to Kent Elastomer Products for donating all of the rubber tubing that I used to create this body of work. Lee Ann Pringle and the whole team responded quickly to any rubber needs I had, supporting this local Kent State graduate student in the completion of my goal.

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INTRODUCTION

In my thesis, I created a series of sculptural objects from found materials that exemplify my interest in line and texture. My art is familiar, yet illusive, woven from layers of various widths of latex tubing interlaced with rigid, painted metal that act as wire-like scaffolds. The lines move in, around, and off the sculptures, giving a life-form to the object within space. Lines can be described in terms of length, width, height, and depth. Aristotle stated, “a line by its motion produces a surface, and a point by its motion a line.”¹ When these elements are combined through either parallel accumulation, or crosshatching, they create a visual surface or texture.

“Lines can lead the eye in a path around an image. And they can also be used as a powerful way to express something to the viewer. Directional lines express a variety of messages. Diagonal lines, for example, express the sense of energy and give movement to a piece. Horizontal lines, on the other hand, give a piece a sense of calmness and rest. And vertical lines portray structure and strength.”²

The lines and textures that I saw in the natural environment have always inspired me. They often appeared to be chaotic, particularly in contrast with structural elements in the built environment. Lines in structures can be linear or straight, curved, or angled because humans create them with the use of geometric calculations and principles.

Man-made lines are organized to provide structure according to set plans; nature’s lines are organized to promote survival.

Ivy spiraling around buildings is an example of the contrasting visual and physical lines that result from man’s placement of objects within nature’s paths. Each vine creates different textures upon the building. The plant chooses its own course, unrestrained and unlimited by the building’s purpose or plan. The ivy “weaves over and under, round its own tendrils,” just as if Mother Nature was weaving a basket. However it is the architectural geometry of the structure that influences the character of the line.

BASKETRY AND LINES

Basket making, developed as early as 4000 B.C., is considered one of the oldest basic crafts. It is an art form that developed from a utilitarian need for containment. Materials used in basketry were influenced by the intended function, the overall design plan of the weaver, and what was readily available in the immediate surroundings. In Madagascar, raffia was selected from the island palm trees due to its soft, waxy texture. Indigenous American tribes throughout our country have based their choice of material on the same criteria. Tribes in the Artic used sea grasses and whalebone, while New England tribes would peel wood off the local swamp ash to construct their baskets.

Sturdy fibers were used to form the ribs that would give the new basket its own size, shape and structure. The static elements were laid down first. In a round basket, they are referred to as spokes; in other shapes they are called stakes or staves. Flexible linear materials would be used to fill in the sides. This technique is referred to as twining.

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or wickerwork. Other frequently used weaving processes include: coiling, plaiting and twining. In coiling, the material is tightly wound around the fiber, and locked into position with a stitcher. In some cultures, the inner coiled material was a local grass, while the stitcher material was made from stronger grass or tree fiber. Plaiting creates a checker weave in which the weft crosses over and under one warp at a time. Twining uses two or more wefts to cross over each other between warps.

Virginia Harvey noted that, “In the past, basket makers worked almost entirely from the viewpoint that form follows function. A container was needed, so a piece was designed to fill this need.” She further noted that since craftsmen now are no longer limited by function, nontraditional materials are “being coiled, twined, woven, and plaited into new forms and shapes.” The technique of weaving baskets has been passed along, re-discovered, and re-invented throughout the years. The boundless craft has left an open territory for an artist to use new sculptural forms as a metaphor for containment. I sought to create sculpture by mastering and combining traditional techniques, while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of material and form.

My work emphasizes the line as both integral to the sculpture and independent forms. When the linear elements I selected were woven together, they were transformed from a pile of jumbled, flexible lines into a form that reflected a quality of order and release. The woven lines created a bumpy scale-like texture, but returned to their full natural character when released from the structure. The resulting forms resonate with a mysterious quality that builds on the idea of containment.

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“When an object is discarded,” noted Suzanne Seriff, “it is perceived as being no longer of value to the person or society that once possessed it.”

As such, it can become raw material for artistic impression. The first step in the creation of my work was the selection of discarded metal objects from the mid 20th century that could be used to form armatures for embellishment. The objects I chose contained slender lines that provided an openwork structure. That framework then was transformed through the incorporation of recycled rubber tubes in bold saturated colors. Solid planes of texture were defined through a basket weaving process to divide the space, or create a sense of inside and outside. None of my sculptures is solid. Each has a void through which the viewer is able to thoroughly experience the piece from multiple perspectives.

The rubber tubing was flexible and fluid, malleable enough to be configured as a range of lines. Sometimes the lines were pulled, or held under tension, and appeared to be almost as rigid as the supportive metal skeleton. As the rubber tubes moved beyond the confines of the support, they draped and responded to gravity. The resultant three-dimensional forms seemed at once familiar and strange.

Rubber and metal, the materials I used, shared the commonalities of having been manufactured, recycled, and being readily available. Working with found materials and structures provided parameters that demanded a level of response that directed the work in unexpected ways. Problem solving was an on-going process that required a level of resourcefulness, just as in the past when basket weavers needed to work with

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the materials they found around them. This strategy of improvisation allowed me to create forms composed entirely of lines that seemed to be animated by gravity, presenting dualities that inspire a range of interpretations.

My sculptures hover between function and non-function, history and the present. Where once they were vessels formed to contain something, new lines and texture reimagined their meaning. The viewer is touched at such a primal level that one’s mind is left to rationalize an emotional reaction to each sculpture. This reaction results from the visual quality of the lines combined with the tactile texture. While one piece may remind you of swirling gears, another looks like an animated tear-drop that could be a Dr. Seuss creation, or reminiscent of an ancient vessel. Allowing the viewer to have an emotional experience with the piece enables me to share my fascination of lines viewed in space.
Figure 1

Green Lantern: A Diamond in the Rough
Latex Rubber Tubing, metal, cotton yarn
60" x 12" x 8.5"
Figure 2

Crown Royal

Latex Rubber Tubing, metal, cotton yarn

60" x 14" x 24"
Figure 3
When it Rains, It Pours
Latex Rubber Tubing, metal
68" x 12" x 17"
Figure 4
Reinvent the Wheel
Latex Rubber Tubing, metal, cotton yarn
28" x 24" x 30"
Figure 5

Land of Milk and Honey
Latex Rubber Tubing, metal
REFERENCES

http://www.creativeglossary.com/art-mediums/directional-line.html


