BOUND AND FRACTURED

A Thesis

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for the Degree Master of Fine Arts

by

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PLATES

1. Shelved Relationships, 21 units, variable size, mixed media including wood, wax, glass, fiber, foam, etc., 1979–81 P. 19
2. Shelved Relationships, installation P. 20
3. Shelved Relationships, installation P. 21
4. Shelved Relationships, installation P. 22
5. Shelved Relationships, detail P. 23
6. Shelved Relationships, detail P. 24
7. Shelved Relationships, detail P. 25
8. Layering, 15 units, from 8"x12"x2" to 20"x24"x2", foam, glass, wire, 1980. P. 26
9. Layering, installation P. 27
10. Chrysalides, 21 units, from 10"x18"x8", foam, fiber, glass, steel, 1980. P. 28
11. Chrysalides, detail P. 29
12. Totems, 2 units, smaller – 3'x6"x6", taller – 6'x6"x6", wood, fiber, glass, steel, rubber, 1980. P. 30
13. Slab Density, 15 units, each 3'x3'x4", wood, fiber, glass, steel, 1981. P. 31
"For them [the Japanese craftsmen] the art of packaging came to have important meaning in itself quite apart from the importance of the contents of the package. The package came to have symbolic value quite distinct from its practical function."
Hideyuki Oka, How to Wrap Five More Eggs, Weatherhill.

"[Hesse utilized] tension between looseness and tightness There's a need for liberation plus a need for constraint ritualistically carried out...There's an almost sadistic side."
Lucy Lippard, Eva Hesse, New York University Press.

Despite the development and proliferation of modern medical practices, the personal techniques of First Aid remain invaluable knowledge for times of crisis. It is through the standard First Aid methods of binding wounds that I was introduced to wrapping (much earlier than to art). Although at times I attempted to introduce an element which suggested injury or the practical application of these techniques into my work, with very limited success, my overriding interest was exclusively in the repetitive activity of the wrapping as a way of containment and of altering the surface of an object. Present also during my pre-art years and continuing through the present was a family environment which stressed the importance of organization. When I later encountered such post minimal or anti-formalist artists as Lucas Samaras and Eva Hesse, I
discovered a new visual language which encouraged me to employ both the excitement of wrapping and organization.

Although my Bachelor of Fine Arts was achieved in painting, I more strongly responded to the physicality of sculptural forms. During my graduate studies I developed a greater sense of sculpture as distinct from three-dimensional paintings in part accomplished through concentration on the activity of the construction process and formal relationships of materials to develop the clarity of statement.

Having entered into graduate studies with only a modest knowledge of the conventions and history of sculpture, I found it advantageous to devote a period of time to researching the historical basis for my imagery and choice of materials. This scrutiny was directed both to my personal history and the accumulation of images by artists whose work had been and in several cases remained influential. It is through this study that a relationship began to evolve between my perception of the methods and the madness, so to speak. The research findings began to aid me in situating myself within the context of the larger art community and by doing so led to more conceptually challenging inquiries.
"The true craftsman...knows that the material he works with has a mind of its own and that if he seeks to impose absolute control, both the material and the finished product will take revenge on him."

"Traditional Japanese packaging is not the result of contemplation and theory."

Predictably, the logic-oriented formalism of minimalist attitudes which dominated art activities from the early to mid-sixties spawned a state of reactions loosely grouped under the heading post-minimalist. ¹

Similar to post-impressionist attitudes in the depths of the various deviations, the post-minimalist artists shared an emphasis on the uniqueness of individual personality. This was characterized by a willingness to involve autobiography and energized by the success of the women's movement which encouraged the use of methods and substances often classified as feminine, for example an autobiographical focus, a concentration on patterning, interest in the coloristic aspects of sculpture, the use of eccentric open forms and impermanent materials, and the increase in the use of basic craft methods as well as assemblage. ²
In 1965 William Seitz described assemblage as "usually more concerned with associations of poetic or emotional impact than with pure form." One of the more obsessive uses of assemblage to construct personal statements during this period is in the boxes and chairs of Lucas Samaras. Samaras, a Greek born artist, concerned himself in the 1960's and early 1970's with the construction of Boschian fantasies of sharp extrusions and visual puns. Early in his career, Samaras abandoned paint and canvas for objects and boxes, believing that he could achieve a greater hardness and brilliance of presence through more tangible means.

Despite early characterization as a primitive or fetishist, Samaras relied heavily on a background of Dada and Surrealism as well as an aggressive Freudian stance. This sophistication manifested itself in his treatment of boxes or chairs as supports for ideas, much like stretched canvas. These he then covered with rows of space-dyed yarn or pins in a formal ordering in contrast to the insertion of stuffed birds, mirrors, self-portraits, or other elements with the quality of devotional objects. In a world, then, of clean dullness, Samaras was messy and improbable, exposing a private cosmology through poetic means.

It is this use of the box as an integral aspect of a work, rather than a convention for display, along with the willingness to expose that horror vacui of apparent danger in Samaras' work which initially delighted me and influenced my own work. I am both attracted and repelled by the outer covering of many of these early boxes, but it is precisely that duality of response which allows me to repeatedly explore that context through the use of contrasting materials and mildly biological imagery. The impact of
the overt narcissism (self-portraits, repeated name) was diminished by the strong narcissism implicit in the use of the container format, i.e., the artist reveals only partially the layers of accumulated experience to a controlled and moderately unreadable degree.

In conjunction with this attraction to Samaras's imagery was an equally strong attraction to his method of construction. As a possible result of the lack of technical instruction offered during my early sculpture training, the use of assemblage by Samaras as well as other post-minimalist artists seemed a particularly direct and effective solution to my desire to work materials with little access to conventional sculptural methods. It became more important to suit the media to the idea rather than tailor the concept to the technique. A willingness to experiment with the methods of construction was also developed in conjunction with an interest in experimentation with various media. Adaptation of craft methods (such as wrapping and the application of decorative elements over the entire surface of an object) and the use of simple, often unusual materials to develop autobiographical concepts were concerns which Samaras shared with several emerging women artists who also dealt with personal views of existence. Artists such as Jackie Winsor, Hannah Wilke, Lynda Benglis, Nancy Graves, and Ree Morton looked to a variety of substances and their combinations in the construction of compulsive, personal works. The media and methods used by these sculptors varied but their approach to the development of their work was similar. They used materials to accomplish specific purposes rather than attempting to fit their ideas within an existing framework. These media experiments had such diverse sources as other art forms (Morton-theater), industry (Benglis-plastics, Winsor-carpentry), and
primitive construction (Graves—sticks and mud). This willingness to view all substances as potential sculptural material and to deal with them in such a way as benefits the sculptural idea best are the major elements of this work by which I have been affected.

Another artist well known for her experimentations, was Eva Hesse. She was at one time encouraged to "...go into the psychology of bondage...having control, dominance of the object." As Samaras approached the imagery of a particular work with a sense of compulsiveness, so did Hesse emphasize the activity involved in the making of a work. Sharing with Samaras (whose work she admired) an interest in multiplicity, she utilized this repetition of objects and within objects as a method of containing anger and constructing personal rituals. These rituals and images remained essentially ambiguous due to the avoidance of specific meaning which Hesse might have attached to her work. It is, however, the direct intellectual ordering imposed upon sensuous materials in which Hesse was, perhaps, most successful.

The German-born Hesse abandoned painting for sculpture and the sense of something concrete. Painting did not supply a "logic of realness" for her and, as with Samaras, she desired expression with a greater basis in reality. The works which followed this move to sculpture were constructed of simple and generally impermanent media -- paper mache, string, laytex. Perhaps due to the ease with which the majority of these materials could be manipulated, Hesse constructed numerous small experimental models for larger works, at times working out problems pertaining to the formal relationships between media and the specific structuring of a particular piece. When a successful combination of materials was developed
on a small scale, Hesse enlarged it to its final form. However, in doing so, she also multiplied it with the premise that..."Repetition does enlarge or increase an idea or purpose in a statement if something is meaningful, maybe it's more meaningful said ten times. It's not just an aesthetic choice. If something is absurd it's much more exaggerated, much more absurd if it's repeated." This combination of organic shapes and materials developed into simple repetitious imagery formed works which are at once alive and eerie in their presence. They are works in which, like Samara's boxes, the primary consideration seems one of controlled if perhaps unconscious obsessiveness.

Hesse's use of organic material and insistence on repetition were important to me in the development of my work. Her willingness to work with untested media combinations in strong and personal statements became an important influence on my own work. The obsessive quality which she found so natural also attracted me to such diverse artists as Louise Nevelson, Christo, and Carl Andre. In part shared by several of the previously mentioned artists, this sense of repeated involvement with a particular concept allowed each artist to refine the physical developments which result. Thus, through interaction with a specific concept and materials, did each artist go beyond manipulation of objects to a more intangible sense of the poetic development of the work. An awareness of the poetics of sculptural imagery has only begun to become evident to me. My concentration on revealing the construction of a work had overshadowed my concern of the subtleties of the object. In considering these understated elements I have begun to become more interested in that which is lyrical in them.
One discovery in the development of this sense of the poetic has been that of traditional packaging of the Orient, particularly of Japan. Often direct solutions to problems of transport and storage, these simple manipulations of unassuming materials are frequently very sculptural. Found today almost exclusively near the cultural center of Kyoto, the rapidly vanishing craft of traditional packaging reflects a harmonious view of the natural work and a pride and concern for human dignity. All things were considered packagable -- fish, plants, food, string -- even offerings of coins were not submitted without a simple paper twist to conceal them and give them a flower-like appearance.

The tradition of Japanese packaging unfolds into three images. The first of these built on utilization through necessity. This very early form depended upon a strong respect for nature and the willingness to use these materials which lay at hand. Artless and direct, there are in these manifestations no attempts to hide flaws and no pretense to importance beyond immediate usage. They are developed with an economy of material, often with preference to relationships of time and place between container and contained.

The second aspect of this tradition is that of handicraft. This is the folk art aspect, a more highly refined aesthetic sensibility in relationship to functional object. Craftsmen of this tradition attempted consciously to develop their products into reflections of a highly sensitive beauty. Packages became symbols, ultimately more important than that which they contained. The development of techniques of construction and ornamentation became so sophisticated as to professionlize the production of these containers. Packages produced from these professional shops
were charming works of art reflecting two central principles: an aesthetic philosophy that stated that everything could and should be beautiful and a value system in which all objects, large or small, expensive or cheap were of real value.

Finally, the third characteristic of traditional Japanese packaging is a consciousness of ritual and consideration.11 Packaging by its nature sets an object apart from others like it while the acts of wrapping and unwrapping require one to focus attention on the contents of that package. Thus did the traditional Japanese craftsmen develop methods of containment which reflected a deep respect for the spiritual in humanity and nature and an overwhelming sensitivity to visual expression. I am drawn to this combination of ritual and directness of design. Although at one time affecting me overtly, Japanese packaging remains largely an influence to my imagery and manner of working through primarily archtypical references.

The approach of the Japanese craftsman to his materials in solving problems of packaging is both direct and honest. It is this directness of treatment and variety of solutions to the problems of packaging which has largely influenced me. Because I am only vaguely familiar with the Japanese culture my attraction to these objects was essentially a visual orientation. In conjunction with a deep respect for this culture, I have begun to be interested in the directness of manipulation of materials exhibited in the early works. This directness seems to emphasize and clarify relationships of forms in the basic statement.
"Even though the pieces were solid, they were solid with activity."
Catalog, Jackie Winsor/Sculpture, The Contemporary Arts Center, October 2 to November 21, 1976.

"On the other hand, the word 'art' interests me very much. If it comes from the Sanskrit, as I've heard, it signifies 'making'."
Pierrie Cabanne, The Documents of Twentieth Century Art: Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, Viking Press.

I came to sculpture by a circuitous route of other media. In early sculptural works I worked with repetition and compartmentalization with the vaguest hints of contrasting materials. My images were explored tentatively and were given less importance than the importance allocated the constraints of the larger work. This larger work concept was a tightly worked blueprint by which I developed each work to the exclusion of other possibilities suggested by the media or imagery.

The destruction of this dependency was aided by deliberately narrowing my concerns and exploring ideas within those chosen areas. Focusing on repetitive wrapping, I began to develop modular pieces in which the activity involved dominated the construction as well as the final work. This interest in construction to the disregard of the end product was the reverse of the reliance on a master plan. I relied now on the
strength of the activity and made few decisions that dealt with the disposition of the modules beyond their completion. I ignored individual elements for the masses.

This step towards defining specific concerns encouraged me to research influences and noteworthy images. I assembled the collected information into four categories which reflected my perceived concerns: repetition, obsession, containers, and contrasts of materials. The combined efforts of this research and the earlier decision to limit areas of investigation provided me with a stronger basis from which to continue sculptural development. Although I had previously worked with the same concerns on occasion, acknowledging their specific existence allowed for more directed investigation of each and an awareness of the manifestations of these elements in the work of other artists whose output may not have otherwise attracted my attention.

In narrowing and defining these interests I discovered that I was able to make stronger statements which, combined with an emerging attitude of experimentation, began to result in statements of a less grotesque and more personal nature. My introduction to glass during this time was via this route of media experimentation. I deliberately avoided learning traditional methods of glass working in order to restrict being heavily influenced by historical precedent. Instead, I chose to integrate glass into my continued investigation of wrapping and packaging forms. This was the first attempt I had to focus on a particular medium and the formal properties inherent to it. Although the activity of making and the record of that activity continued to be of great importance, the formal and poetic qualities of the materials began to play an important part in the construc-
ion of the work.

The work exhibited in the thesis show reflected this progression through materials and the development of the activity of wrapping and packaging. Divided into five works, the exhibition also emphasized the reconsideration of relationships between independently constructed elements. The items which composed the installation Shelved Relationships (plates 1-7) were developed as media experiments or segments of larger works. When paired with objects from other endeavors, as was suggested by frequent rearranging of studio contents, each item revealed characteristics in common and in contrast with others. Throughout this wide range of forms, these characteristics are revealed as the four isolated through my earlier research. The tailoring of the shelves to the individual and somewhat obsessive treatment of the work with their use suggesting more intimate views by the observer.

In contrast, the treatment of space in Layering (plates 8, 9) was much less dramatic. Frontally oriented, these wire-bound glass and foam packages did not intrude into the viewer's space as did Shelved Relationships. The richness of these slabs instead lay in the subtleties revealed through the variation of line produced by the layers of wire, glass cracks, and string as well as the formal relationships of glass to foam. This was my first full scale attempt to reveal tension through foam compressed by glass and glass cracked by foam. The introduction of laminated glass for this work began to satisfy a long interest in the pairing of sharp and pliant materials. As my initial interest in glass was due to its potentially dangerous ability to fracture, the discovery of laminated glass, which remains essentially intact when cracked, allowed me to explore
this quality further.

As the size of the foam and glass bundles increased, the necessity
of employing a stronger means of securing them became apparent. I began
to work with industrial steel strapping which radically changed the character
of the glass and foam bundles. In *Chrysalides* (plates 10, 11) each bundle
began as a sandwich of foam and glass similar to the elements of *Layering*.
The tension caused by the strapping when tightened created the cracking
and peculiar shape. Similar to the earlier repetitive wrapping, each bundle
revealed the history of its making, documenting, through overlapping
straps and stress cracking of the glass, the activity required to achieve
its form. It was through this strapping that I began to feel as if I were
violating personal glass taboos through deliberately courting a type of
dangerous situation (broken glass). The directness of this treatment also
led to a directness of display with bundles suspended over similar bundles
on the floor. Tension between floor and hanging bundles was increased
through the use of wire rather than rope or other apparently sturdier
material to hang them. The orientation of hanging and reclining empha-
sized the objects and their collective weightiness.

Pursuing non-traditional approaches to glass, I began nailing the
laminated glass to wood. The result was two works, *Totems* (plate 12)
and *Slab Density* (plate 13), in both of which I attempted to wrap glass
much as I had previously wrapped fabric and rope. *Totems*, the earlier of
the two, was composed of two experiments with this technique in which
glass restrains fiber around a wood core. Simply presented, these infor-
mation laden posts leaned against the gallery wall with rough vertical
strength.
**Slab Density**, also with glass nailed over fiber and wood, emphasized the weightiness of the composition. The approach to the structure of the individual elements of this work was more deliberately formal than in many of the other works exhibited. The restriction of the wood frame to a simple square element was in contrast to the semi-controlled glass and fiber. Treatment of the materials in conjunction with the placement, leaning against one another in a row, was both direct and true to the characteristics of the materials: the glass shattered, the fiber draped, the wood revealed grain and the separation of individual boards, while the nails emphasized the tensions and frictions through which the work is composed. In a straightforward way, the back-to-back orientation of the slabs both emphasized the layering of elements of each object while fostering a sense of mystery concerning the appearance of the solid interior space of the work.
SUMMARY

Having narrowed my areas of concern, my graduate studies proceeded largely on the basis of my desire for ongoing activity. The objects produced by the wrapping and bundling require certain formal considerations, while demanding a continuation of repetitive and somewhat obsessive activity. In limiting my lines of inquiry, I have freed myself to deeper investigation of those lines and to listen to the resultant products for clues as to where to investigate further. Aiding the development of this sense of discrimination has also been my involvement as an assistant curator of the Ohio State University Galleries and my progress in critical writing about art. Together the experiences of my graduate studies have encouraged a sense of professional responsibility within me and begun to introduce me to the great wit and drama of the sculptural object.
FOOTNOTES


2. Pincus-Witten, p. 16.


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