

# Profile

## Norma Minkowitz: A Synthesis of Creativity

Fiber artist Norma Minkowitz's quarter-century body of work shows a synthesis of creativity with materials and with ideas that is emblematic of the rise of fiber arts in America during that time. To study the elements of her artistry, then, may well illuminate some important features that will be instructive and enjoyable to fiber artists and spectators. We discern three intersecting artistic values, each one of which is strong enough to command attention in its own right. It is their interplay, however, that determines Minkowitz's unique identity.

The first value is formal, in fact the most basic formal element in art: the line. Minkowitz's first focus was on pen and ink drawing and pencil sketching, which she regarded as "an intimate record of an artist's imagination." While the fashioned forms pictured on these pages may seem far from the pure simplicity of two-dimensional lines, Minkowitz's employment of the filament as a three-dimensional line echoes both this intimacy and that purity. In *Miss Fit*, the line discernible by virtue of the crocheting of the filament is at once shape-determining and individual at every point, like the best lines in any medium.

The second element, crochet, both brings depth to the linear structure of the work, and serves as the bridge to the ideational content. Minkowitz's crocheted and shellacked lines are not merely formal. They are deep, conveying a twined fragility and strength, giving the work a darker, mythical feel that works together with its formal elegance. This fiber element is Minkowitz's most recognized contribution to the field, and justly so. However, it depends for its eerie effectiveness upon its relationship to the more formal side of her work. See, for example, *Son of Daedalus*, where the shellac-covered crocheted lines give an odd sense of meticulousness and disorder, confidence and vulnerability.

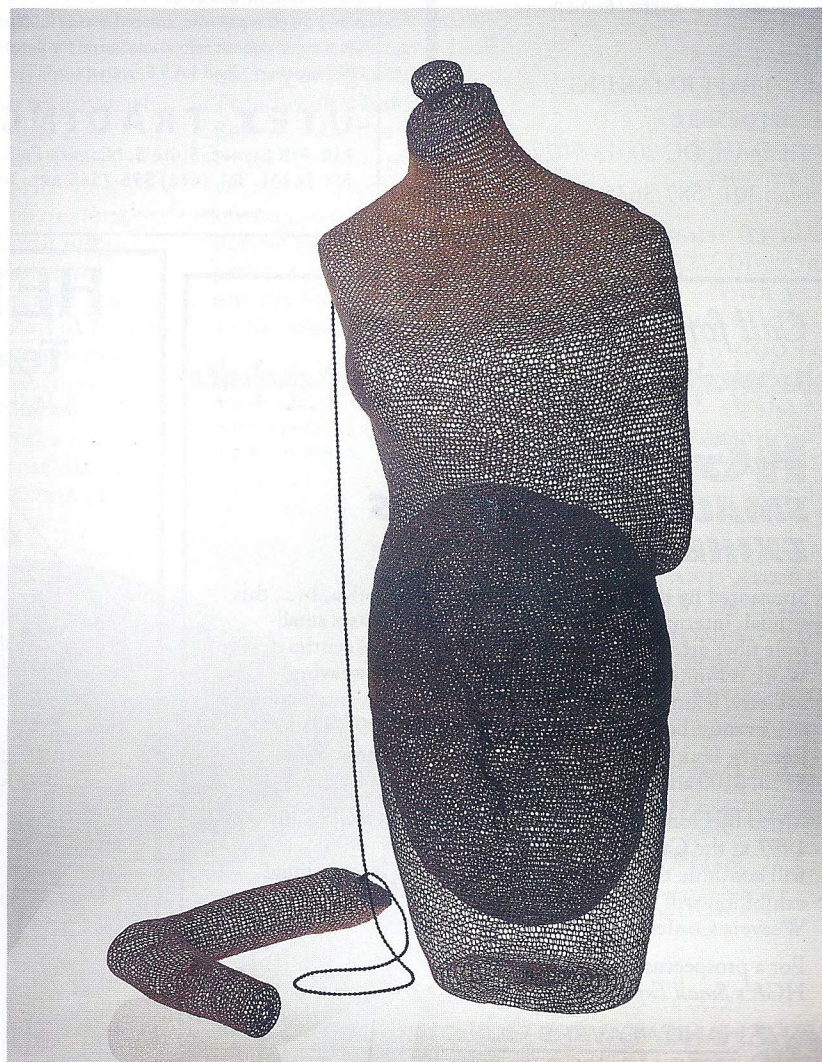
This leads to the third ideational element, that we will call "simultaneity/duality." Critics have noted the merging of inside and outside in Minkowitz's vessel-like work. In *Torso*, not only outside and inside but male and female interpenetrate one another. To generalize this quality, one can say that at every point in one of Minkowitz's works, one can discern a duality in which each member is simultaneously present, but neither is reduced to the other (as each suggests the other).

Now that Minkowitz is moving from crochet into other media, such as papier-mache and some nonfiber

materials such as bronze, it will be interesting to see how the qualities of her crochet-inspired work cross over. For her work of the past decades, however, fiber—the crocheting art—not only provides the essential crossing point whereby formal elements and ideas meet, it constitutes the life of the serious and provocative work of Norma Minkowitz.

—Akiko Kotani  
and Bernard Freydberg

*Akiko Kotani and Bernard Freydberg teach art and philosophy, respectively, at Slippery Rock University, Pennsylvania.*



*Miss Fit*, 1996; crocheted, painted fiber; 39-3/4 by 25 by 17 inches.  
Photo: Joseph Kugelsky.