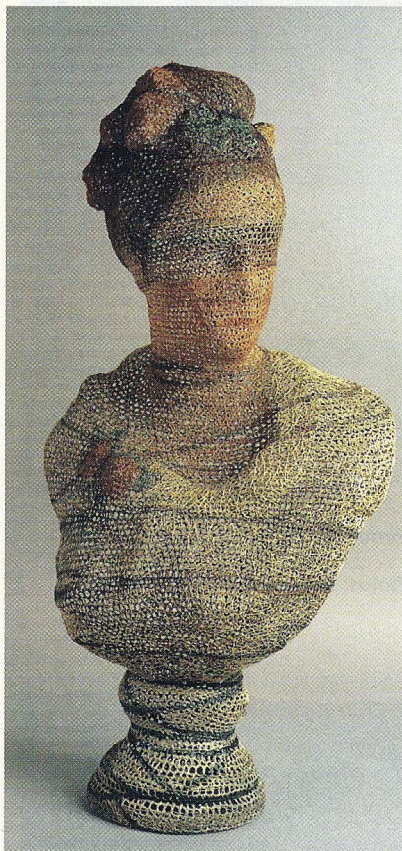


Norma Minkowitz: Portraits and Passages



Norma Minkowitz's solo show this past autumn (October 5–November 2) at Bellas Artes in Santa Fe was large considering that the artist sculpts with crochet hooks. The 10 pieces in "Portraits and Passages" continue a nearly 20-year exploration into forms in which the interior is as important as the exterior.

Minkowitz has crocheted around objects from basketballs to mannequins, sometimes altering shapes with papier-mâché or other techniques before beginning her thread work. It all starts with a tiny circle that connects with other circles, creating a seemingly living organism. Words such as *membrane*, *web*, and *translucent* are often used in describing this Connecticut artist's work, and the reason is clear: We can see through what is being held in. The pieces, while made durable with epoxy, never lose their sense of fragility. On their sur-

faces, the artist continues creating by painting or adding threads or wire.

"Portraits and Passages" brings together a collection of works that appear at first unrelated to each other. In studying the pieces, however, a narrative emerges.

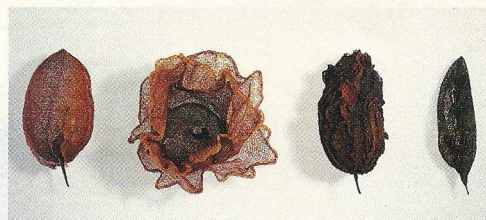
In *Sequence 2002*, the life cycle of a flower is examined across nearly six feet of wall space. These fiber, wire, acrylic, and resin pieces (22 inches high) tell a story in rusts, reds, and oranges—a pod, a bloom about to burst, a rose at its fullest, a shriveled bud.

From considering the passage of time to a literal passage, *Down the Nile* is an homage to the biblical



story of Moses in the bulrushes. It's a crocheted baby cradled in blue and green fiber waves. It's appropriate that an artist would recreate a cradle originally made with plants that gave humankind its early paper and paintbrushes.

There is a playful quality to this work, in some pieces less subtle than in others. They range from a reinterpretation of a classic child's toy of stackable rings—the plastic donut shapes of primary colors reinterpreted in black to gray thread—to simple portraits, for instance, a soft piece created around a Victorian bust of a woman.



Ruskyta Certza, an anatomical heart, was a bold departure, with its surface heavily worked with veinlike threads and paint. The heart is surrounded by what looked like the spectacular lace headdress worn by the women of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico but in fact is based on a collar of a peasant blouse that belonged to Minkowitz's aristocratic Russian mother.

The only two-dimensional piece, *Map*, was hung on the wall under an enclosed acrylic frame. A thin strand from the piece threaded in and out of three tiny holes drilled in the plastic near the bottom. What, I wondered, could this lovely minimal

piece be doing here? But titles can guide one's thinking, and this *Map* took on the feeling of an abstract informational plaque such as one might find on a museum wall. Perhaps this interpretation was a leap from what was intended, but Minkowitz seemed to be upping the narrative ante with "Portraits and Passages." The show

opened up the opportunity for viewers to create their own stories.

—Ruth Lopez

Ruth Lopez is an arts writer who lives in Chicago.

Far left: *Silent Woman, 2002*; 29 by 15 by 9.5 inches.

Center: *Ruskyta Certza, 2002*; 39 by 17 by 4 inches.

Top: *Sequence, 2002*; 22 by 65 by 13 inches.

Photos courtesy of Bellas Artes, Santa Fe.