

IN REVIEW

Norma Minkowitz: Passion of the Line Bellas Artes

It's tempting to compare Norma Minkowitz to a modern-day wizard. Her continuing investigation into the themes of transparency and concealment prods the edges of comfort, implying stranger things between heaven and earth than we have yet dreamt of. *Passion of the Line*, a recent exhibit of nine new sculptures fabricated from fiber, wire, resin, paint, and found materials, celebrates her twentieth anniversary with Bellas Artes gallery in Santa Fe (August 4-31, 2007). The sculptor explores a change of direction in her latest work with mixed but mesmerizing results.

The hand-crocheted forms for which Minkowitz is known have undergone a metamorphosis. "These pieces represent a new step for Norma," said Charlotte Kornstein, co-owner of Bellas Artes with her husband, Bob. "Now stitchery and painting are taking over the surface." Delving deep into her life-long love of drawing, Minkowitz has built up surfaces, created denser, more opaque lines, varying the weight and thickness of the fiber threads and coating them in resins, modeling paste, paint, wire and found objects. As she

explains in her artist's statement, "The hidden areas become mysterious and ominous, revealing layer upon layer of elaborate tracery that mimics the irregularities of line drawing. The momentum of motion strives to conceal and reveal each element of crosshatching, stitching, and painting in pursuit of a complex structure that invites the viewer to contemplate concept as well as process."

A silvery-charcoal palette, with an occasional flare of red or gold paint, unites all the pieces in a gleaming, metallic carapace. It intensifies the eerie, even foreboding mood, yet the scale of the sculptures suggests intimacy. The spontaneous quality in Minkowitz's work also beckons the viewer to participate in interpreting a sculpture's meaning; there could, for that matter, be several meanings. That sense of companionship, of openness to the viewer's perceptions, humanizes the pieces and makes them part of a rhythm of back-and-forth between the viewer and the artist.

Some pieces reveal the transition as structure becomes surface. In *Football*, a woman's

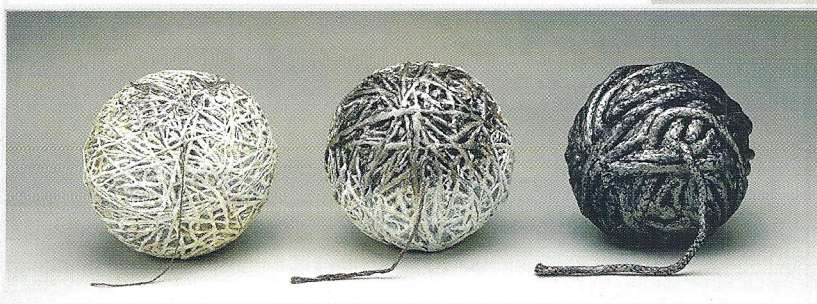
Santa Fe, New Mexico



NORMA MINKOWITZ *Football* Fiber, resin, modeling paste, paint, 7" x 13.5" x 4", 2007. Photo: Richard Bergen.

high-heeled ankle boot wrought in a delicate mesh of lines over crochet, sits attached to a ball of thread. The boot holds the shape of an absent human foot; the ball of thread recalls the absent human hand of the creator. The airy feeling and the holes to peer through creates a porous sense of lightness. The witty *Football* contrasts with the uneasy menace of the more enclosed *Thumbelina Leaves Home*. A doll's hand reaches out from behind a toadstool on top of a charcoal-colored, intricately woven cocoon. The child's toy hand opposes a smaller dark hand attached to a twig-like form snaking out from underneath. Whatever lurks inside is confined by the opaque strands covering the surface, making the cocoon simultaneously look fragile and more cage-like.

The dramatic *Baggage*, inspired by nature, landscape, and the human body, is a full-blown elaboration of surface. The sculpture evokes worlds of myth and legend, but it is the surface that engrosses the imagination. Almost like sleight-of-hand, it changes and transforms with each glance. The back of a female torso merges into a



flared cape that resembles wings. Look closer, and chasms and mountains appear. On each shoulder stands the profiled body of a bird, but all the heads, human and bird, are chopped off. The ropey lines of the form exude a muscular toughness as they twine in a luminous impasto of resin, paste, and silver paint. Process itself plays like a musical chord through the sculpture, harmonizing and arranging the parts with the whole.

Although Minkowitz's attention to surface triggers complex insights about process and concept, it also mires some work in obscurity. The amoeba-shaped *Lost* lies inertly against the wall. Despite the beautifully articulated linear construct, the piece seems too inscrutable, unresponsive to interest or inquiry. *Sequence*, three balls of yarn in a row progressing from fine to

heavy strands, is entertaining but lacks intrigue.

The exciting *Scavenger*, however, reveals the potency of Minkowitz's new preoccupations. A funnel shape writhing with surface movement resolves at the top into the body of a crow. From its beak dangles a bundle, decorated with a snake and an insect. Although the allusion—in Dylan Thomas's words, "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower"—appears more unequivocal than usual for the artist, it sets a frame of reference for discovering how much there is to ponder in the sculpture. *Scavenger* throbs with life and ideas, paying tribute both to creation and to the animating power of art itself. Only a wizard could conjure with such spellbinding power.

—Reviewed by Leslie Clark, a writer living in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

TOP LEFT: NORMA MINKOWITZ *Thumbelina Leaves Home* Fiber, resin, modeling paste, paint, found material, 9" x 16" x 10", 2007.

TOP RIGHT: NORMA MINKOWITZ *Baggage* Fiber, resin, modeling paste, paint, 43" x 50" x 6", 2007.

BOTTOM LEFT: NORMA MINKOWITZ *Sequence* Fiber, resin, modeling paste, paint, each unit 11" x 11" x 11", 2007.

BOTTOM RIGHT: NORMA MINKOWITZ *Scavenger* Fiber, resin, modeling paste, paint, wire, rubber, 48" x 13" x 9", 2007. Photos: Richard Berigen.