

TRADITION || INNOVATION

American Masterpieces of Southern Craft & Traditional Art

Shawne Major

The following text is a written questionnaire completed by the artist on behalf of the curator.

In general, why do you do what you do? What underlies the commitment you bring to your work?

I make art the way I do because it is the most accurate and direct representation of the way I feel. I am influenced by everything around me, everything I see and hear and feel goes into any piece I am working on at one time.



*Shawne Major- Portal II Portal Detail
Photo by Luis Quiles, 2007*

My cultural experience serves as the accent for my visual language. It is the filter through which I see the world and the voice through which I discuss the concepts that are important to me. My work is not only *about* my cultural experience but *of* it.

What influences your work? Is the history of craft, or the media you use, important to your work and if so how? Does your work draw references from or have any link to the past and if so how?

Materials and the processes by which they are joined are crucial to the production of my meaning. These object and material choices draw heavily upon my identity as a woman of a working class Southern background. My vocabulary — a combination of kitsch (cheap, mass marketed objects), ersatz and craft materials, body detritus (hair, fingernails), junk, personal objects, traditional feminine

elements (lace, ribbon, dress patterns, etc.) —is refigured into forms derived from childhood memory. The accumulation and collage processes serve as metaphors for the build-up, organization and assimilation of information. The personal objects are evidences of pain, happiness, loss, guilt, shame—the material detritus of the everyday human experience. Every bit or piece celebrates a personal history.

How is utility and function a part of your work?

The materials are acquired almost exclusively through second-hand sources. From flea markets, garage sales and acquaintances, they are objects that have been in use in the real world are collected. These objects bring with them fragments of experience through their associations and history. The processes by which these disparate elements are connected are as integral to the piece as the objects themselves. They are sewn, woven, bound, patched, and crocheted. These processes are slow, meditative, obsessive, additive, and collectively refer to the veil of security that is continuously created and accepted by the individual in the form of belief systems; they are a kind of physical rosary that with every step solidifies one's faith in eventual understanding or enlightenment. By treating the mundane objects in a ritualistic manner with care and attention, meaning can be drawn from everyday experience.

Can you describe your studio practice? Do you work in isolation, independently, in collaboration, in community?

I work alone, though my six-year old daughter often shares my studio with me.

Do you see yourself as a keeper of the culture? What does this idea mean to you? What would like your legacy to be?

As an artist I see myself not a keeper but a *producer* of culture.

How is your work evolving?

With this slow repetitive way of working a real time interval is suggested where the narrative can exist. This “narrative” is the continuing dialogue between the elements, the processes, the form and their associations. This dialogue involves the memories, stories and feelings that together make up my experience.

Methods of connection generate the syntax that orders and makes sense of my visual words. For example; one method of connection—sewing—serves to hold together and contextualize the various objects and materials that together make up the work. So, if a piece is made up of hair, pattern paper, gum, beads, etc. and held together by stitches then the individual ideas, memories and fragments of experience evoked by each object can be read from a specifically feminine viewpoint. Of course each method of connection carries with it much more than a

viewpoint; it has at least as many ideas, memories and fragments of experience as the objects employed.