

# *Mercurial Objects:* *luxuriant obsession*



BETSY BRANDT SHARON CHURCH GINGER ERTZ REBECCA HUTCHINSON TERENCE LAVIN BRUCE METCALF STEPHANIE METZ ANNABETH ROSEN ANAT SHIFAN

# *Mercurial Objects:* *luxuriant obsession*

**AN INVITATIONAL EXHIBITION**  
**March 25–May 1, 2011**

EXHIBITING ARTISTS

BETSY BRANDT

SHARON CHURCH

GINGER ERTZ

REBECCA HUTCHINSON

TERRENCE LAVIN

BRUCE METCALF

STEPHANIE METZ

ANNABETH ROSEN

ANAT SHIFTAN

**Schick Art Gallery**

Peter Stake, Director

Rebecca Shepard, Curatorial Assistant

Saisselin Art Building, 2nd Floor

Skidmore College

[www.skidmore.edu/schick](http://www.skidmore.edu/schick)

“ The most important tool the artist fashions through constant practice is faith in his ability to produce miracles when they are needed. ”

MARK ROTHKO, 1947

Bucking the prevalent art world practice of selecting works of art and groups of artists as evidence to support an overarching thematic idea, political agenda, or socially constructive goal, the artists and works in *Mercurial Objects: Luxuriant Obsession*, at the Schick Art Gallery, were invited to participate simply because the artists are fascinating and their works are mysteriously beautiful. The rationale for selection was twofold: educational and aesthetic. Artists teaching at Skidmore chose the work of artists they like and would like their students to see. It has been some time since the Schick has devoted an exhibition entirely to three-dimensional work, and, aesthetically, a mix of artists working with different approaches in a wide range of materials looked particularly enticing.

First and foremost this is an exhibition of and about objects. And, since the objects are all works of art, the exhibition is also about artists. Over years of practice, all artists develop a unique way of working and have an affinity for certain materials. In a small exhibition like this it is fairly easy for the viewer to differentiate one artist's work from another. Each work in the exhibition has a particular identity, meaning, and “handprint” that have been invested in the work by the artist through a process of search, discovery, adjustment, refinement, and craft. But art objects are slippery things, mutable and mercurial. Like chameleons, they retain their identity and intent while taking on new flavors and colors with each new viewing, especially in the charged context of an exhibition.

Considering the absence of a specific thematic organization, then, and the loose shaping of the artist selection by a group of individual faculty, surprising similarities arise among the works and artists of the exhibition. First, a passion for materials and form, especially organic form, is an obvious and dominant thread connecting the artists. Sharon Church, Terrence Lavin, Bruce Metcalf, and Anat Shifan enthrall us through resplendent form, meticulous technique and sheer beauty, while Betsy Brandt, Ginger Ertz, Rebecca Hutchinson, Stephanie Metz, and Annabeth Rosen cultivate surprise and the accidental in their work, yielding discoveries that are unexpected, imaginatively rich, and visually stunning. Formal and thematic undercurrents weave through the exhibition, linking objects together, enticing us to make connections.

Through extraordinarily different materials, Brandt and Hutchinson both speak to issues of organic reproduction, growth, and structure—Brandt employing artificial flower stamens and hot glue, Hutchinson porcelain. Brandt's grid coaxes us to look beyond the similarities of her “specimens” to subtle differences of color and shape, whereas

Hutchinson's installation directs us to issues of the environment. Shiftan, on the other hand, using materials and forms that strongly resemble Hutchinson's, investigates matters of perception and illusion, and raises questions of artistic genre. Curiously, the work of both also embodies undertones of life, growth, death, and decay.

In precious works of adornment that in their functionality intimate the body, Metcalf and Church celebrate life and beauty amid issues of status and gender. But the overtones of voluptuousness and sexuality in their jewelry are strangely related to similar strains in the sinister yet innocently playful, quasi-animal forms of Metz, the bio-morphic currents of Ertz, and the writhing, patterned tube structures of Rosen. Rosen, in dynamic pieces suggesting collective organisms that hover somewhere between animal, vegetable, and industrial, hints at ideas of organic repetition and form generation, ideas that also appear in the work of Brandt and Ertz. The "low tech," commercially produced materials employed by Brandt and Ertz and the serially constructed ceramic components of Rosen give rise to seemingly endless variation in their hands, yet remain convincingly biomorphic amid the sparkle. Embodying mysterious purpose or function, Lavin's structures suggest apparatus rather than organism; however, the work prods our subconscious memory toward a mysterious referent in much the same way that Metz's quiet, yet technically astounding emergent forms evoke a sense of wonder and nagging familiarity.

As the works reside together in the gallery for few short weeks, each art object asserts its uniqueness, yet new interpretations and associations arise. Connections are made, and currents spark. Materials and objects take on a life of their own. The precious and the commonplace, the magical and the familiar, the beautiful and the sinister, as Sharon Church says, "speak to the riddle of our existence."

In the end, every exhibition is a collaborative process involving the hard work and generous assistance of many others. Rebecca Shepard, the Schick Art Gallery's Curatorial Assistant, came on board midway through the year for a hectic and stressful initiation and was instrumental in moving the exhibition forward quickly and assuredly. The exhibition had its genesis in discussion with faculty of the Art Department gallery committee—Leslie Ferst, Sangwook Lee, Trish Lyell, and Iona Park—all of whom along with David Peterson worked generously to shape and focus the exhibition, suggest and contact artists, and select work. The Schick student assistant staff—Lee Strasser, Lauren Heffernan, Olivia Boone, Grace Nelson, Kim Delli Paoli, Will Dowling, Max Friedlander Moore, Elizabeth Harris—helped prepare the gallery space for installation, collected materials and publicity for the exhibition, and monitored the gallery during public hours. Mary Parlman and Andrea Wise of Skidmore's Office of Communications and Zoe Anderson, our graphic designer, gave valuable assistance and advice. Finally, we owe a heartfelt thanks to the artists themselves, who managed to deliver visually stunning, wonderfully inventive, and endlessly imaginative work within a very slim timeframe.

Peter Stake, Director  
Schick Art Gallery

## REBECCA HUTCHINSON

In nature there are diverse states of existence that I continue to study: the structure of nature...the resilience of nature, and the complexity and awe in the engineering of nature. ...My work focuses on the respect for craft and the endless influences found in nature. Formally and structurally my interest is in the details: quality of craft, quality of connections, quality of structure and, conceptually, an understanding of (the relation of) all physical parts to the whole.

### ***Collective Bloom***

2011

11 x 7 x 6 ft

Fired and unfired cone 6  
porcelain paperclay,  
handmade paper,  
organic materials

Funded in part by the Puffin Foundation



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Schick Art Gallery

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