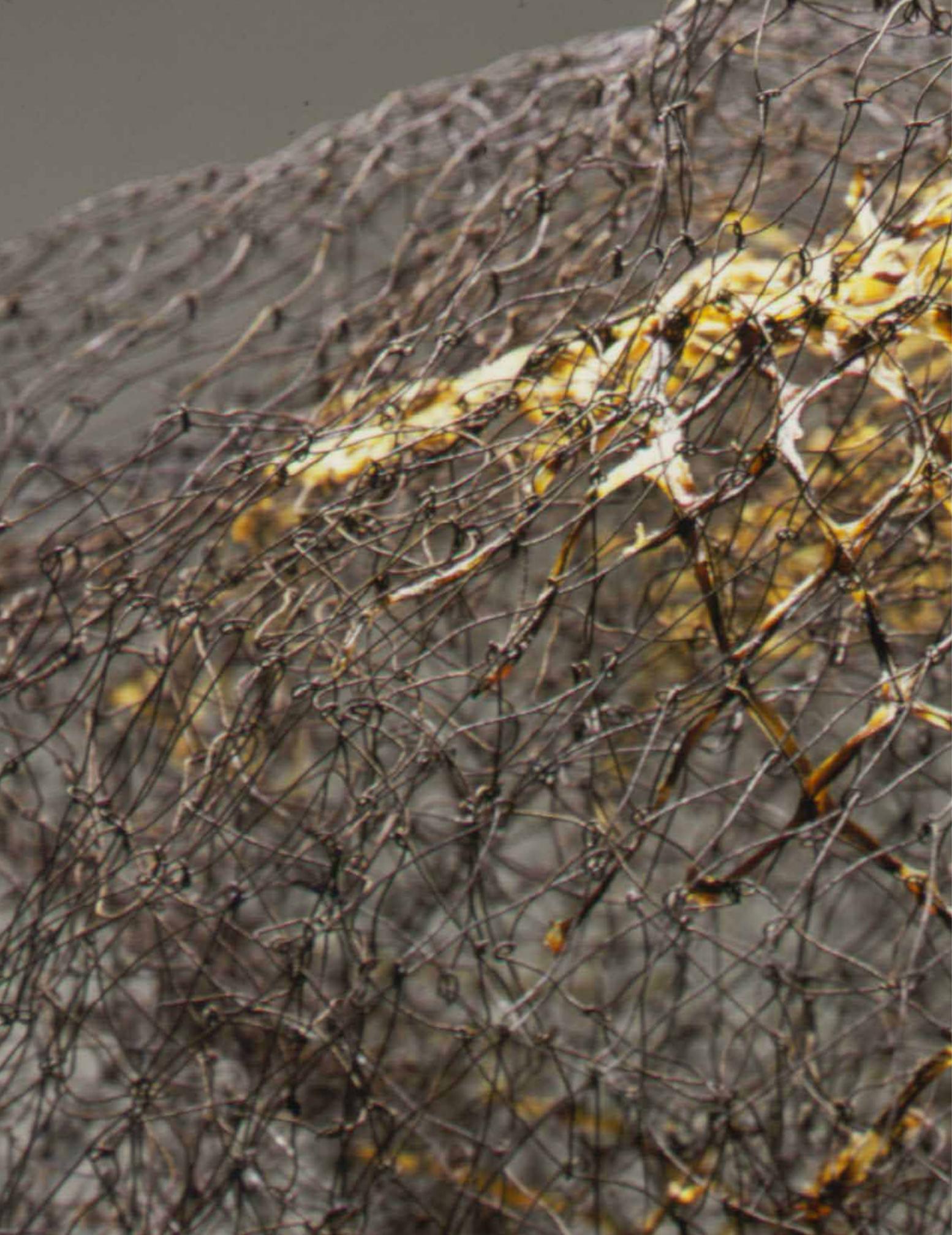




PAT HICKMAN: TRACES OF TIME



December 8, 2011 - January 27, 2012

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Lasse Antonsen, Curator

UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS DARTMOUTH
COLLEGE OF VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

The University Art Gallery is pleased to present a series of works and installations by the fiber artist Pat Hickman. The work on view is a testament to her exquisite sensibility and love of materials and process. The exhibition covers recent work, as well as a selection of work done within the last seventeen years.

Pat Hickman explains in the interview in this catalog, that she came rather late to the world of art. Her involvement happened to coincide with the growth of the Art Textile Movement of the 1970s. This was a time when there was a new self-consciousness within the craft field, a time when studio artists were merging traditional approaches with a newfound, contemporary sensibility.

These remarkable developments within the craft field were also reflected in the creation of the Program in Artisanry at Boston University in 1975. The program later merged with the Swain School of Design in New Bedford in 1985, and then, as part of the Swain School, merged in 1988 with, what was at the time, Southeastern Massachusetts University now University of Massachusetts Dartmouth.

While living in the Boston area in the early 1970s, Pat Hickman began to take classes at the Cambridge Adult Education Center with the scholar and fiber artist, Joanne Segal Brandford. Brandford saw art and scholarship as a joint undertaking, intimately connected to one's personal life. Her example set the stage for Hickman's future studies when she moved to California a few years later, where she herself simultaneously pursued the history of textiles and her own studio work as a graduate student at the University of California Berkeley.

Once in California, Pat Hickman studied world textiles at the ethnographic collections in the Lowie Museum of Anthropology, and began to establish her vocabulary as an artist within the textile field, successfully merging new and old techniques. While in the Bay Area in the 1970s and 80s, she became a significant voice in a textile movement that had, by then, gained a large presence of practitioners and programs.

Pat Hickman furthermore contributed to the field by curating a series of historical exhibitions, focusing on textiles of Alaska, on Jewish costumes and customs in Turkey, and on the history of ethnic wedding dresses. The first of these exhibitions was inspired by her study of the Alaskan Native's use of animal intestines to waterproof garments. Pig gut, usually used for sausage making became, and has remained, an important material as part of Pat Hickman's artistic vocabulary.

Pat Hickman's work has been a continuous exploration of cultural and personal sensibilities, of the relationship of the hand to the stories and forces that shape us, and to the "languages" that can be found in Nature and in specific locations.

The richness of Pat Hickman's visual imagination is evident in the beauty and intricacy of her work, and in the emphasis she places on process. As she reflects at the end of the interview:

"The places I've lived and traveled and the textiles I've studied from every corner of the earth are now within, shaping my imagination, how I see and what I try to say in my work. I have entered the world through cloth, through fiber, through the objects I discover in the places where I find myself. My hands take these materials and make something new."

Lasse Antonsen, Curator



Pat Hickman in her studio, 2011. Photo by Frank Vitali



“Downriver Ravages” (detail), 2011

PAT HICKMAN

Interview, October 2011

I grew up in a small town in Northeastern Colorado, on the prairie. My mother was a grade school teacher; my dad was a butcher who co-owned a small grocery store. I had trouble watching him occasionally butcher at his sister’s ranch. People in my family hunt and fish, eating the meat they get. I liked going with dad to find arrowheads or to discover “treasures” in a dump. Dad had a curiosity about the larger world. He loved National Geographic Magazine.

One grandmother made quilts, always flower garden patterns. Even when she could no longer organize quilt blocks, she loved moving printed cloth patterns and colors around, putting them together. She had such a good eye and passion for what she did.

I was late in discovering that there was such a thing as art. In high school, the art teacher was a coach and driver’s education teacher, not someone who encouraged exposure to works of art. Going to art museums was not part of my growing up. If my family went to a museum, it was a natural history museum.

There were some wonderful teachers in my school - single women who taught biology, world history, English literature, and Latin. From them I learned the world was bigger than my farming community.

For 21 years, I lived on the Great Plains of Colorado - flat, hard, dust-blown. The endless expanse where I grew up held little beauty for me.

In my piece, the wire-knotted-netted sculptural work “Tumbleweed,” I express yearning, knowing I was shaped by that place where I started, even as I had to leave it.

At the University of Colorado where I did my undergraduate work in English Language and Literature, I was fortunate to be a student in the Honors program. I studied with Walter Weir, a philosophy professor who, in four years of small seminars, broadened my life experience through courses in the Humanities - classes which combined literature, music and art. The faculty, especially Classics Professor Hazel Barnes, helped me be aware of the visual world.

After graduation I went to Italy and Greece as part of a Classical Studies tour with Prof. Weir and other honors' students. I loved being in Europe, discovering sculpture and paintings, visiting classical sites, which by then I'd studied and was eager to experience.

Before that, in the summer of 1960, I was in Santa Fe, living with a friend and her family. I was the hostess in the dining room at La Posada Hotel, where many of the opera singers from the Met stayed when they were there for the Santa Fe opera season. I also collected tickets at the Santa Fe Opera, which allowed me to attend all rehearsals and performances of the season. That was the year Stravinsky was there celebrating his 80th birthday.

In Santa Fe I came to know a Hungarian painter, Odon Hullenkremer, whose paintings covered the walls at La Posada. My friend Judy Dodge and I modeled for Odon in his studio on Canyon Road. I remember his drawings of Turkey. He'd gone there when he'd left his home country and had been there during a cholera epidemic. It was through him that I became interested in Turkey, a country totally unfamiliar to me.

During my senior year at the University of Colorado, I became interested in teaching English as a second language. I knew by then that I was going to be in Greece at the end of the summer, and that I'd like to linger in Europe. I applied, and was accepted, for a job teaching English at an American Girls' School in Uskudar, Turkey, on the Asian side of the Bosphorus.

It was there, exploring in Istanbul and in the countryside, that I discovered Ottoman Turkish art and architecture, including beautiful, handcrafted textiles, which I wanted to learn more about. This was the beginning of studying textile processes. I eventually attended a class at the Applied Fine Arts Academy in Istanbul and began to learn to weave. From Turkey I traveled to many other countries in the Middle East, and also returned to Europe, now thoroughly delighting in the art and architecture of cities I visited. I had fallen in love with Istanbul, which has kept luring me back over many subsequent years. I've lived there a total of seven years now, spread over many separate visits.

I returned to the U.S., to the Boston area, and began to take textile art in classes at the Cambridge Adult Education Center, studying with Joanne Segal Brandford. This was in the early 1970s, when there was great excitement about art in the fiber medium. During this time, I shared a studio in Somerville with seven weavers including Joanne Segal Brandford and Mary Dusenbury.

When my husband, Bill Hickman, who had been a graduate student at Harvard University, was offered a job teaching Turkish language and literature at the University of California at Berkeley, we moved with our two-year-old twin daughters across the country.

Joanne Brandford encouraged me to study with Lillian Elliott and with Ed Rossbach once I was in California, convinced that they would become remarkable mentors for me. The mood at that time in the fiber world was that everything began in the 1970s. From my appreciation of traditional Turkish textiles I knew of a longer past. By then, I had a deep interest in ethnographic world textiles, in textile history, and wanted to learn more. Joanne encouraged my pursuit of that direction, along with making and learning through my hands as a maker.

When I got to Berkeley, I began studying with Lillian Elliott in mostly nonloom studio classes at the then California College of Arts & Crafts. I developed a portfolio to submit in application for acceptance into the graduate program with Rossbach at the University of California Berkeley.

That was such a heady time in Berkeley, which was the center of the Fiber movement, partly because of the many well trained fiber artists who'd come out of programs at CCAC and/or the University of California at Berkeley and who wanted to linger there, teaching part time in whatever classes they could offer at Pacific Basin School of Textile Art or at Fiberworks.

I felt very lucky to be in the Bay Area during the 70s and 80s. Since I hadn't studied art as an undergraduate, I extended my years in the program with Rossbach, completing a written thesis on Turkish "oya," needle lace edging. I had returned for a research year to Istanbul to study what I had observed earlier, that women communicated visual messages with tiny three-dimensional edging on their headscarves. For example, if a woman was arguing with her husband, she wore a scarf with red pepper edging and nothing needed to be said. Or she could announce her pregnancy with small stuffed pink forms, or inform her community that her son had gone to the army. I found this silent communication of great interest. Such wordless communication is what art does. I knew I wanted to be part of this world of visual communication through my studio making.

As an artist, my work has been informed and shaped by the study of world textiles. Beginning in Berkeley with the Design Department's study collection, and the ethnographic collections in the Lowie Museum of Anthropology, now the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, I began to learn textile



“Landscape and Memory” (detail), 2004

history the way a painter might study art history. I spent hours photographing world textiles, seeing them as an idea file, a sketch book for me. I didn’t want to imitate or duplicate what anonymous makers had done so well, creating objects for use in particular cultures at a particular time. But their remarkable, sophisticated skill was astounding to me. I was and am drawn to indigenous textiles, which to a Western eye seem to be created with surprising juxtapositions of color and pattern and techniques, operating by their own set of rules.

These textiles, over many years of looking, have entered my imagination, becoming part of my vocabulary as I continue to make my work.

I decided to pursue a couple of directions in my work, one based on my research in Turkey and another on my studio exploration. My thesis exhibition in 1977 was based on my study of ancient Peruvian textiles, archeological fragments, printed images of fragments - especially scaffolded textiles (of discontinuous warp and weft) in the collection at the then Lowie Museum of Anthropology.

When I completed my degree, Ed Rossbach was going on sabbatical and asked me to teach a textile history course for one semester. It seemed terrifying. I didn’t know enough; I’d be teaching students who were my peers. But Rossbach recognized my deep interest, and that I would rise to this challenge long before I had acknowledged or recognized I could move in this direction. Teaching his course helped shape what I subsequently wanted to offer in my own teaching, along with studio courses.

During this time the artist Lillian Elliott and I had become close friends and colleagues. We each had small children, yet were determined to find time to create our artwork along with family responsibilities. By this time I had started working with gut (sausage casings).

One of the areas I included in my textile history course of the Americas and Europe focused on the textiles of Alaska. I’d seen a gut parka on display in an exhibit Anne Wilson curated at the downtown center of the de Young Museum on Ethnic Textiles. I was amazed at the beauty of this functional, waterproof garment made of animal intestines, and that an interior membrane could be a protective outer covering.

In preparation for teaching the textile history course I carefully studied and photographed many gut and fish skin parkas from Alaska in the Lowie collection, and felt the need for my own hands to

experiment with a related material. So from a delicatessen in Oakland, I purchased hog casings and began my exploration.

There was no “how to” reference for working with gut. My process has been one of exploration, an intuitive process of experimenting, creating a tough membrane, almost like parchment, through the building up of layers. I work with sausage casings wet. When they dry, stretched over a structure, they become taut. I’m interested in both structure and skin. The contraction of gut when drying, the pulling power of those membranes, changes the shape of a structure, finally achieving a balance, a resolution of the separate materials.

Lillian Elliott was creating her baskets at this time, along with tapestries and the other directions she pursued. We started getting together one day a week to focus on our own individual work. One day Lillian spoke of covering a form she’d created with a paper skin. I suggested that the material I was working with, gut, might attach to her reed structure, and thus began our eleven years of collaborative work, creating structure and skin three-dimensional sculptural forms.

Lillian built the structures; I covered them with skin membranes. One or the other of us would paint the finished work. By this time we shared a studio in Berkeley, devoting one day each week to our collaborative work. Our own individual work, very different from our collaborative work, continued throughout these eleven years - a very productive time.

Lillian had studied ceramics at Cranbrook. She always felt her pots were heavy, too heavy, but her large, expressive hands knew how to create form. In covering the reed structures she made, I vicariously learned and felt the importance of space within, of three-dimensional line drawings, of ideas being held, questions raised.

This was a very important phase in my development as an artist. Lillian was a most important mentor for me; she’d known she wanted to be an artist since age three. I was a latecomer to the world of art. We went to every possible lecture and museum exhibit in the Bay Area, which was hopping with visiting artists passing through, offering workshops - a most frenetic, exciting time.

We chose to team-teach courses at Pacific Basin and Fiberworks, sharing a small salary rather than compete over it. We enjoyed proposing and developing courses we wanted to teach and, at

the end of each workday of collaboration, we’d pause, look critically at what we’d separately done on our joint work, and be brutally honest with each other about what the other had done. It was a remarkable, collegial experience of trust, knowing what the other was trying for, able to say if either of us “got it”, re-working, brainstorming, encouraging each other to go beyond what we were doing in our collaborative and individual work. This shared time with Lillian as my primary mentor, had an incredible impact on my life as an artist.

I continued to want to understand more about the use of gut, especially in Alaska, so went there on a research trip, learning from native people who worked with both gut and fish skin.

As a result, I curated an exhibition in 1985 entitled “Innerskins/Outerskins: Gut and Fishskin” at the then San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum. For that exhibition I borrowed examples of mostly functional garments, bags, and boots from provincial museums in Alaska. I also decided to include in the exhibition the work of contemporary artists who worked with skin-like materials, wanting to bring this work together, not necessarily an easy juxtaposition. That exhibition, and the catalogue accompanying it, was important in my understanding more about the traditional, indigenous use of skin membranes, which I have continued to use in my work. I love the way light passes through or seems to come from within gut.

During this time I also each taught courses at the various institutions offering fiber classes in the Bay Area, commuting sometimes from the University of California Davis, to San Francisco State University, to the Richmond Art Center, etc. I felt like a nomad, carrying my personal textile and slide collections, running from one part time job to another. All of this was preparation for me when I finally accepted a tenure track position.

When I was offered a full time teaching position at the University of Hawaii in 1990, I left the Bay Area. For several reasons, it was a good time for me to accept this position. I had completed curating an exhibition on Ethnic Wedding Dress at the downtown center of the de Young Museum in San Francisco and had co-curated another exhibition, “Embellished Lives: Customs and Costumes of the Jewish Communities of Turkey” at the Judah L. Magnes museum in Berkeley. The offer to go to Honolulu meant that I could shape a fiber program in the Art Department in Hawaii, a place known for its rich tradition and use of fiber. I was ready to see what I could do.



“Vesicle” 1999

I respond to place through the materials available to me as potential art materials, materials that to me carry meaning and ideas. When living in Hawaii, the materials around me - palm sheaths and other natural plant materials I could transform - influenced me. Where I live and work now in New York, I’m responding to the mark making by rust, to found, abandoned railroad plates.

In a brick complex near my studio in Garnerville, NY, I covered a rusty elevator door, approximately 170 years old, with gut. Workers, in this series of buildings beginning in the 1830s, dyed and printed calico cloth. The elevator door speaks of time and change. Some of the metal has disappeared exposing the weathered wooden frame beneath. I have picked up the patterning from the rust, transferred it onto the gut skin membrane, responding to the history of this place. I like the intimacy of this material - one thing becoming another through touch and the passage of time. Most recently, after the devastation of Hurricane Irene on this complex, with debris pouring through the creek and destroying the gallery, the heart of this place, I’ve partially covered this door, “Calicoed by Rust,” with what appear to be tossed metal railroad plates, creating “Downriver Ravages.”

My work and ongoing investigation seem related to my lingering over, paying attention to, detailed museum objects, studying shape and form. I’m now doing this outdoors, most recently at Haystack, in Maine.

When spruce trees decay, they usually fall over in the damp woods, sometimes into a river, eventually disappearing into the river bottom. What resist this disintegration are the strange shapes formed where the branch joins the trunk, a hardened core like a tooth in a human head. These are called river teeth, named by sailors who have seen these tooth-like shapes in water. In the woods I find river teeth, mostly in rotting logs or stumps, hollow trunks, with river teeth still part of the tree. I wiggle what remains of the branch, and if it’s ready, the tree releases and gives me a river tooth. I cover these with gut - sausage casings - further extending their life. I am exploring visual metaphors with these river teeth, the last part of the body to let go.

In the early 90’s I received a commission to design monumental entrance gates for the Maui Arts & Cultural Center. An art consultant from Australia, Pamille Berg, could see in my interest in “oya” (Turkish needle lace edging) and in my studio work in netting, the potential to design gates.

This opportunity encouraged me to listen to stories by Hawaiians, stories of nets, to learn from fishermen. At the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, I studied and photographed the tightly netted

background of Hawaiian feather capes and fishing nets from their Pacific island collection.

My gates made reference to Nets of Makali'i, Nets of the Pleiades, referring to that constellation, as for Hawaiians, stars represent the knots of suspended nets. During the rainy season, when these nets in the sky open, blessings pour down upon the earth, through the eyes or openings of the nets. It is a time of renewal, when wars cease, games are played, and nets are mended - to me an appropriate reference for an arts and cultural center.

The gate commission on Maui created a desire to transform materials, from fiber to metal, to think and work bigger than ever before. The opportunity to have work in fiber cast in metal and the magic, the alchemy, of transformation raised questions for me regarding hard vs. soft materials, questions of permanence, value in the art world placed on choice of materials.

After the gate commission, I had some smaller scale fiber sculpture I'd made in gut cast into bronze, including "Gone" and "Ordnance."

As a senior member of my field - art in the fiber medium - I have contributed to The Textile Society of America and to the Brandford/ Elliott Award for Excellence in Fiber Art, by membership on their boards of directors. I have been honored as a Fellow of the American Craft Council. These years of service to my field, in addition to full-time teaching, have been richly rewarded, mostly by coming to know other professional artist/colleagues.

Now I live with a writer, Gail Hovey, who regularly gives me books to read, who edits my texts, helps name my pieces and together we look at art in New York City. We love this phase of our lives, seeing what each of us can do in our creative work, supporting and encouraging each other's focus.

Where I have come now for this phase of my life, is the last of several similar places I have lived where land and water meet - on the Bosphorus in Istanbul, in California's Bay Area, on Oahu, and now on the Hudson. These places have brought me my recurring themes: cycles and seasons, memory and loss, aging and mortality.

As the decades gather behind me, a paradoxical cascading of time demonstrates itself in my work. My acute awareness that an end will one day come is accompanied by an accelerated outpouring of ideas to be made visible. The places I've lived and traveled and the textiles I've studied from every corner of the earth are now within, shaping my imagination, how I see and what I try to say in my work. I have entered the world through cloth, through fiber, through the objects I discover in the places where I find myself. My hands take these materials and make something new.



"Garlic" 2003

FRONT COVER:

Pat Hickman at work on "Callicoeed by Rust" which after Hurricane Irene was reworked and became "Downriver Ravages" 2011

INSIDE FRONT AND BACK COVER:

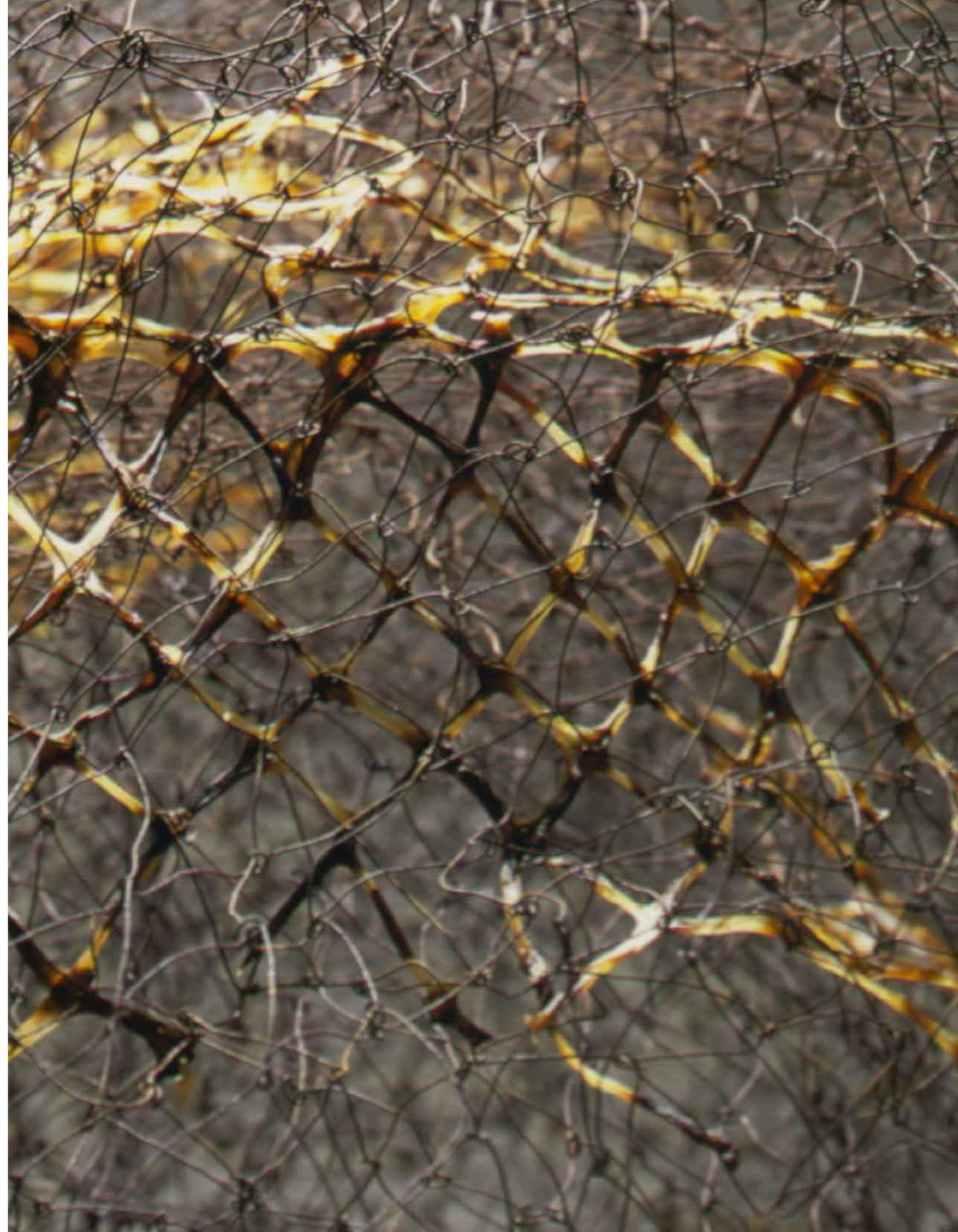
"Tumbleweed" (detail), 2004

BACK COVER:

"Linger" 2011



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