

Ann Weber at BAM

by [Christopher Schnoor](#)



"Corrugated" runs through Sunday, Nov. 8.
Boise Art Museum, 670 E. Julia Davis Dr., 208-345-8330,
boiseartmuseum.org

California artist [Ann Weber](#) likes to play with contradictions. She makes fine art sculpture out of a graffiti-grade medium, pitting notions of spontaneity and transitoriness against ideals of permanence and tradition. Although her formal priorities are abstract, her free-standing works are quite figurative, alternating between the totemic and the

personable, and often referencing the male–female dichotomy found in nature. Weber's material is crude—cardboard cut from boxes or found in dumpsters—yet her creative ideas are inspired by refined forms found in the natural world and art history. Her art is not exactly representational, and never literal, yet it conjures up a range of associations. Weber is an artist with high art intentions while remaining true to an ingrained craft persuasion.

In its sculpture court and adjacent gallery spaces, Boise Art Museum is hosting "Corrugated," a selection of Weber's creations from the last decade, and the latest in a string of exhibitions by artists who challenge the long–accepted prejudices and parameters of fine art through an emphasis on the crafts, often in conjunction with the use of nontraditional materials and processes. She is tuned into the current zeitgeist.

Yet Weber's sculpture has a distinct character of its own. One reason is her considerable experience as a ceramic artist. For 15 years prior to moving west and enrolling in the MFA program at the [California College of Arts](#), Weber made production pottery in New York. In California, she broadened her aesthetic interests, studying ceramic sculpture under noted artist [Viola Frey](#), taking her own well–honed craft skills in a new direction. However, the labor–intensive process of working in clay, which is a particularly cumbersome medium for creating large–scale pieces, became increasingly frustrating for Weber.

Upon seeing [architect Frank Gehry](#)'s cardboard furniture in 1991, Weber found her solution. It was an inspiration that enabled her to explore a wider range of sculptural possibilities, including creating improbable, eccentric designs. She also found the resourcefulness of making beauty from a common and mundane material both intriguing and satisfying. And it has allowed her to inject a certain whimsy into her compositions. Still, Weber's sculptural work has retained an emphasis on simple, rounded forms common to pottery, particularly the universal circular and cylindrical shapes found in nature, which, however, somewhat limits her formal repertoire.

Weber's approach, then, fuses found–art abstraction, pottery–making and basket weaving, a bringing together of modern and post–modern aesthetics and ancient traditions. Her process, like the materials, is basic: Cardboard cut into long strips is woven together into shapes and stapled, then sealed with a shellac or polyurethane coating, with taller pieces mounted on steel bases. Most of the sculpture at BAM retains the cardboard's natural, monochromatic soft brown, with several exceptions in which Weber has introduced colored and printed surfaces for a different, Pop Art touch.

Three groups of free-standing sculpture occupy the sculpture court and are the centerpiece of the show. The gathering feels like a strange reception comprised of exotic, larger-than-life chess pieces, abstract yet oddly figurative, including a pair of monumental works--Almost 16 and 15 and 1/2--whose bearing and presence stamp them as the king and queen of this ensemble. In the Disney-esque scene, each group assumes a personality type: an aloof, royal couple; the eight socializing courtiers of Wonderland whose splashes of color suggest military decorations and finery; and the five, roly-poly characters of Curiouser and Curiouser costumed in loud commercial labeling as the lower rung of this social order.

Weber has a knack for animating her larger sculpture with off-balance, idiosyncratic forms and combinations that seem to defy the laws of physics. Sometimes her pieces have dance-like buoyancy with a suggestive, light-footed disequilibrium, and minimal ground contact like a ballerina en pointe. For the artist, these intentional design quirks and intimations of eminent collapse are metaphors for the inherent instability of contemporary life. But the demeanor of these characters, and their cartoon-like titles, project more emphatically a sense of play and lightheartedness.

There are works of symmetric grace here, too, such as the densely woven, handsomely finished triad called Night Blooming. The oversize radish and garlic shapes nestle together on the floor like gerbils.

Out in BAM's atrium is Weber's 26-piece wall installation entitled Talking with Tuttle. It is a tribute to the respected sculptor [Richard Tuttle](#) who since the '60s has created an unconventional yet poetic body of paintings, assemblages, sculptures and, most recently, wall reliefs, using a range of unusual, non-art materials. The pieces in Weber's installation are an odd mix of organic subjects and basket-like artifacts or implements. Curious and indefinite, these objects are familiar-looking but remain intentionally vague, leaving the viewer to make the call, as Tuttle would appreciate.

Finally, Weber's collaged drawings, which occupy the periphery of the show, deserve mention. Boldly graphic and dynamic they are constructed from cut-out shapes of paper and curved bands of black and low-key colored charcoal. The larger examples entitled Connecting, Pairs and Arm in Arm, have a hefty, rough-and-tumble energy to them that is captivating, particularly up close. In the smaller-sized series, striated and solid-color oval and elliptical forms nudge one another like molecules or river rocks. More than studies, they are elegant abstract works in their own right.