

VISUAL ARTS

STUDIO INVASION: Ann Weber

By EKG | Nov 30, 2010



The feeling you get walking into Ann Weber's studio is positively overwhelming (in the best way). Her space is filled floor-to-ceiling with her immense, gasp-inducing cardboard sculptures. For many years, she worked with cardboard's multi-tonal, tan shades. Now she's branching out and adding colorful boxes to her materials list. When a particular box with a red circle pattern caught her eye at Long's, she made repeat visits until they finally surrendered and unloaded the box. Needless

to say, Weber is dedicated to her craft. We recently had the pleasure of joining her for cheese sandwiches at her Emeryville studio where we got to chatting about what prompted her shift from ceramics to cardboard, what it was like coming up during the Women's Lib Movement, and why craft shouldn't be a dirty word.





EKG: You worked as a potter, selling your work to high-end stores, and later studied with Viola Frey, who is known for her enormous ceramic figures. Why did you decide to go big with cardboard rather than ceramics like Viola?



Ann Weber: "First of all, Viola had large-scale covered in clay. She also had a big studio, two shop techs, and a forklift. There was no way I could've afforded that; it was hard enough just to get through school. I had a small studio and was working with paper mâché and plaster. You could mix a gallon of plaster and make a piece in a day that was as tall as you were. Working on a small scale didn't appeal to me, and so I made the choice to leave clay. I couldn't quite bring myself to tell Viola so I told her



colleague, who was also a teacher of mine, Charles Fisk. I sat down with him and we smoked a cigarette and I said, "Charles, I'm leaving clay." He jumped up and his chair flew back, and he said, "Leave clay! But don't leave art." That was my encouragement to keep going in whatever direction I felt that I needed to go."

"I'd done my MFA show in clay. A lot of it was figurative or derivative of Robert Arneson, Viola, and Richard Shaw. Those were our mentors, and



it was a school of working that was very specific to the Bay Area. In some ways, I almost had to leave clay to get out from under my teachers. I had just moved my studio and there was a big pile of boxes that I'd flattened. I thought well, heck, make the sculptures out of cardboard. There's all this material here. Twenty years later, I still feel like there are infinite possibilities with this crazy material. It's not unlike clay because I'm stapling these strips together and it's very similar to making coil pots."

Did you ever have a hard time being a woman making sculpture since it has been a male dominated medium in the past?

"The Women's Liberation Movement started around the time that I was 15 and 20, so it was very powerful. I feel that the Louises (Louise Nevelson and Louise Bourgeois) and Viola had broken the wall down -- blasted it down, really. The Guerilla Girls and a lot of people were protesting the dearth of women in the galleries and museums, especially on the East Coast, and I felt that we were part of a vanguard that was changing things. And, in school, there were more women than men in fine arts programs, and I think that's still the case. I try not to think about it too much. I would rather just be an artist, rather than feel neglected as an artist. And I think the cream almost always comes to the top, especially if you're putting yourself out there as an artist. If you're alone in your studio making the best art in the world, nobody's going to find it. You have to take responsibility and do what some people call marketing their work, but I call it shepherding your work. You have to make sure that it sees the light of day."

"As far as being a woman artist, that might be one reason why I make such large pieces, to take up a lot of space and magnify myself. I learned a lot



from other male sculptors because they were fearless. It was wonderful to be part of a group called the Pacific Rim Sculptors in the '90s. The men never balked at making things large and heavy because they always



figured that there are cranes. And women can rent cranes just as easily as men! When I started doing public art projects, the process had been demystified and I knew anything was possible.”

Did you have any hesitation about your upcoming exhibition in L.A. because it's at a Craft and Folk Art Museum?

“I don't think craft is a dirty word. In fact, I went to the California College of



Arts and Crafts. As soon as people started erasing crafts from their logos and their titles, I feel like the movement did a knee-jerk kick and people started knitting, and crocheting, and DIY-ing, and Etsy-ing. The craft movement was reborn as soon as it was buried because people couldn't bear to not have craft be part of how they make art."

When you use boxes with recognizable branding, do people say that you're commenting on consumerism?

"There's a little bit of that, but the thing I really resent is being thought of as part of the recycling movement. I feel like I'm coming from Arte Povera and resourcefulness. It's not about recycling. It's about making something out of nothing. My work is not political."

If your art had a soundtrack, what would it be?

"So What by Miles Davis."

See Ann Weber's work in a group show at Caine Shulte Gallery in San Francisco through January 18, 2011 and take a look at this video about her on KQED Spark. Ann Weber has been represented by the Donna Seager Gallery since 2007.

Ann Weber's website is www.annwebersculpture.com