

"TRACY KRUMM: (RE)CONCILIATIONS"

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by KAREN CHAMBERS



In "(Re)Conciliations" at Linda Durham Contemporary Art, Tracy Krumm's solo show featured sculptures made of crocheted wire with found or fabricated metal objects. The works immediately evoked a recollection of the art of Elaine Reichek, Brenda Miller, Ann Wilson, Robert Morris, Eva Hesse, and Mary Shaffer, yet Krumm's sculptures are not derivative.

Like Miller and Reichek, she emphasizes the repetitive nature of women's work. When she was seven, Tracy Krumm's Iowa-farm-wife grandmothers taught her to crochet. They crocheted for hours on end, decorating mundane and functional items. Like Shaffer who "drapes" molten glass from reclaimed tools, Krumm uses rescued objects to "present" her lacy crochetwork. The suspension of Krumm's crocheted panels recalls how Wilson hung fabrics, Morris felt, and Hesse a variety of industrial materials. Those connections are clear, and Krumm herself acknowledges the influence of Martin Puryear and Andy Goldsworthy as well



as Hesse. Still, Krumm's work is unique.

Krumm's pieces demonstrate a wonderful play between the delicate and the robust, the feminine and the masculine. She is skilled at creating a balance between the fineness of the wire and the rugged quality of the found objects. This is true even in *Cable (Cable)* where a loop of thick cable is suspended from a hefty hook. On closer inspection, the dangling cable is revealed to be made up of a crocheted chain of fine wire bunched into a rope, which is itself knotted or crocheted. Despite the beefier scale, Krumm is still playing thick versus, relatively, thin.

Krumm's formal elements also communicate a message about gender, yet her work is not dogmatically "feminist." *Yoke/Curtain* could make such a statement but it is tempered by the compelling and elegant composition. Although a "curtain" of crocheted wire hangs from a yoke, its formal qualities take precedence over its symbolic ones.

This tension between the formal and the symbolic is reversed in *2: Balanced*. Two large crocheted panels puddle on the floor, suspended from an "S" hook and a sharpened hook that respectively represent feminine and masculine. These two hooks are hung on a balance arm and the two sides are equally balanced.

Eight of the works on view were large, but there were also four wall-mounted pieces on a more intimate scale. Here Krumm focused on the female. *Balancing Pair* utilized the same composition as the much larger *2 Balanced*, but here the balance is between two crocheted fish forms, which suggest feminine torsos.

In *Shield/Small* and *Shield/Bib* Krumm has crocheted a delicate and jewelry-like collar and a bib. As much as they evoke necklaces, the crocheted "fabric" is also gathered onto metal loops that are too small to be worn, perhaps representing constriction or even strangling. Still, a message about feminine strength is communicated as *Small* stands away from the wall, quite on its own and unsupported—free and flying—and *Bib* also refuses to succumb to gravity.



Krumm has a background in the textile arts and even worked as a production weaver. That activity led her to nonfunctional textile works and by 1986 to two-dimensional and three-dimensional cast paper pieces, created a year before she received her B.F.A. from the California College of Arts and Crafts in San Francisco.

Ten years later, living in New Mexico and with an M.F.A. from Vermont College of Norwich University, Krumm exhibited her first crocheted-wire sculptures. The use of wire came from a serendipitous discovery of a spool of wire in a disused science lab at Vermont College. Reportedly tired of the two-dimensional, mixed-media textile-and-paper pieces she had been working on, Krumm began crocheting the little bags. In these transitional pieces, crocheted wire bags "emerged from holes in the paper, the fragility of their openwork contrasting strongly with the density of the cast-paper service," writes Jan Janeiro in *Fiberarts* (November/December 1996).

Krumm's work is rigorous, but enchanting. In an artist's statement, she writes, "Process and product are completely intertwined to integrate remnants of time, culture, personal history, and the physical environment. I am continually exploring these issues of accommodation, obsession, and transformation and how these inform the content of my work." Krumm's explorations make for a visually satisfying and an intellectually stimulating experience that is as balanced as her works.

New York-based **Karen Chambers** writes about the visual arts and design.

clockwise from left

Shield/Bib, 2003
crocheted and fabricated metal and found objects
15 x 10 x 2"

Yoke/Curtain, 2003
crocheted and fabricated metal and found objects
73 x 57 x 8"

Balanced, 2003
crocheted and fabricated metal and found objects
121 x 114 x 82"